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Affecting Change:

Young Women's Groups, the Nation-State and the Politics of Gender
in Pre- and Post-Revolutionary Cairo

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2017

Centre for Gender Studies
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Abstract

This thesis examines the gendered production of political and social transformations in contemporary Egypt through an analysis of political affects. It suggests that the relationship between feminism, the state and change in contemporary Egypt cannot be understood or critiqued purely on a discursive level. As a form of governing, the management of affects draws on the everyday politics of gender and sexuality in order to regulate political and social change. The political management of terror, love and safety in Cairo appropriated and capitalized upon deepening reproductive anxieties, generational aspirations and urban transformations in an unstable context.

This research looks at women's rights activism and young feminists that emerged in Cairo between the late Mubarak regime and the current El Sisi regime to examine the feminist disruption of affective management in the deteriorating context of neocolonial repression and masculinist restoration. I chart the intensification of political consciousness and the unfolding of feminist practices that engage with knowledge production and gender-based violence in contrast with the authoritarian patriarchy of the state.

The chapters draw on fieldwork conducted between 2012 and 2013 in Cairo as a crucial site of political turmoil, feminist intervention and violent state remaking. Amid the articulation of existing hierarchies of domination and new forms of control, women's activism and feminist groups challenged the Egyptian regime's affective monopoly on gender roles, in both nation-making and everyday life. Bodily suffering, erased memories, acts of courage – together with the advocacy of reform, interventions on the ground, and denunciations of a wide range of forms of inequality and oppression – were central to personal and political transformation. Opposing the state projects and gendered fantasies that organized violence and nationalism, Egyptian feminists subverted gender models, and revealed the contested and complex work of negotiation that shapes gender subjectivities and brings political, social and cultural change.

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Notes

I have adopted the guidelines of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES)* concerning the transliteration from Arabic to English. In using words said in Egyptian dialect, I transliterated the letter *jīm* (ج) as *gīm* (g) and the letter *qāf* (ق) as *hamza* (').

Informants' names have been anonymised because of privacy and security concerns.

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INTRODUCTION

I. Introduction

I.i Entering the square

When Tahrir Square opened out before my eyes in the autumn of 2012, sprawling beyond the decrepit rococo buildings, it appeared to have none of the rebellious aura I had been expecting after January 2011. Most of the old-fashioned yellow buildings looking onto the square were mounted with giant, newly designed advertisements for food, TV shows, air-conditioning companies and construction sites: they acted as columns for the display of desires at a jammed, polluted major crossroads. In the middle and on the sides of the square, in front of the soon-to-be decommissioned building of the Ministry of Interior known as the Mogamma, I could see a few grassy patches. For a long time no one had stood there long enough to ruin the green; no one had spent the night there in a tent, as had happened during the 18 days. Everything in the square looked as if nothing happened over a year and a half before. Of all the images and emotions about political and social change I may have had as a southern Italian feminist researcher doing fieldwork about young feminists and women activists in the city, Tahrir evoked nothing.

I pictured in the square the Egyptian women activists I had come to Cairo via London to do fieldwork with, with the rather general idea of drawing a link between nationalism and generations of feminists. In my mind I heard again the contested comment by a young feminist activist and then fellow SOAS student, Dina Wahba, who assured me that the presence of women and men in the square had been a “gender suspension” that had lasted for 18 days in 2011.¹ She had described Tahrir filled with tents, with temporary forms of cohabitation and a reshuffled division of labour, where she claimed no harassment had occurred. I saw again the photos, videos and op-eds about the protests that closely followed women’s activism from January 2011 until that very moment. I heard again their yells and chants. There were many men beside them, young and old, holding up signs in praise of a newfound national identity as men in their beloved Egypt (Khalil 2011). The policemen and army recalled my memories of other sites in the city where violent protests had happened: medical doctors and volunteer rescuers intervening to help the protesters attacked – as women doctors and nurses were discouraged from intervening by rumours of sexual assaults (Hamdy 2012); the mosques

¹ The comment was part of her talk at SOAS, University of London, at a conference on the Arab Spring in February 2012: the panel was titled “Gendering the Revolution”.

offering shelter and inviting men to protect their families²; the shocking sequences of violence against women in the winter of 2011, on the verge of exploding again, unbeknownst to us – and somehow still unthinkable.

I found myself wondering what entanglements between nationalism and gender came to life through women activists in the various versions of Tahrir, the place that exemplified the collective force of demands for social and political change. It was a place where many women activists and feminist protestors called not only for the removal of President Mubarak and his entourage, but also for the destruction of the political as a category that deemed their rights untimely and some of their bodies and acts unworthy of Egyptianness. I asked this question again many times in the subsequent months, especially of the 38 activists I was able to encounter and interview when Tahrir again became a site of protests. As the fieldwork unfolded, the remaking of Egypt went on through deeply gendered counter-revolutionary processes. The spaces and symbols used to protest against police abuses, institutional oppression and the shadowy power of the army changed meanings before my eyes: the same bodies that had cheered side by side for social justice in 2011 were in 2013 celebrating a military coup, led by the hypermasculine figure of General El Sisi, as the realization of the revolutionary ideal. The exchange of a religiously grounded authoritarianism for a military one, acclaimed in public spaces, drastically divided many of the women activists I met at that time. How were these radically diverging prospects for political change and the future of the nation – which often used the same words, icons, slogans and spaces as the 2011 protests – made possible? Why would some feminists and women activists accede to militarism and others not? On what other grounds were feminism and gender issues being fought?

In the following chapters, I will address how patriarchal discourses and practises of gendered marginalization capitalized on class and racial tensions, generational anxieties and religious frictions; used the global market of goods; and exploited the fear of violence and the desire for intimacy. This reorganization set gender on a new course as a signifier of individual and national subjectivities. State institutions revitalized the productive intertwinement of sociopolitical change and gender: the mobilization of deeply gendered nationalist discourses and affects supported new urban segregation, bodily discrimination and violent sexualized fantasies, strengthening neoliberal military governance. The transformation of nationalism under these conditions fostered a view of the reproduction of society that justified exclusions and privileges previously contested – for instance, the masculinity of Muslim Brotherhood

² The short movie “Rags and Tatters” (2013) by Ahmad Abdalla depicts this in-between moment in particular.

supporters; the women protesting against military trials and in the square; and the differences between young people living in residential neighbourhoods and those in deprived areas.

The relationship between gender and change, however, was posited by some women's groups and feminist activists in Egypt in very different and more intersectional ways. The women activists I met diverged often, albeit at times contradictorily, from dominant gendered practices and narratives: for the majority of them, equality, bodily freedom and sexual difference were core parts of the gendered struggle for national change. Like the mural in Sheik Rehan Street in Downtown that projected onto the wall the view that stood behind it³, the women activists I met "projected" and elicited other gendered "views" of the same "objects" of interest for the nation-state: institutions and public life; political and intimate subjectivities; national belonging; and the meaning of gender in the quest for change in Egypt.

This thesis tries to explain some of the recent gendered shifts in the governing manoeuvres of the nation-state and in the character of feminist and women's rights strategies and affects. The period examined – in the volatile context of pre- and post-revolutionary Cairo – stretches from the last years of the Mubarak regime through to the early years of El Sisi's government, but it is not presented in a chronological sequence. Instead, in each chapter I attempt to highlight specific affective entanglements of material objects, landscapes and bodies – such as feminist grief, or military patriarchal protection – that were central to the transformation of the field of women's activism in Egypt and shifted the gendered production of political and nationalist subjectivities.

1.ii Transformations in the women's movement and the Egyptian nation-state

The recent and current metamorphoses of the Egyptian women's movement are not extraneous to the many lives of the Egyptian nation-state. Women activists, especially young women, had known a wave of praise and popularity which subsided quickly after the end of February 2011 and turned into open contestation (Al-Ali 2013; Pratt 2015). Their concerns about women's rights, when not attacked or ignored, were dismissed as a future promise of the political rather than a present necessity. The challenge they posed was not only to the political and social status quo, but also to a discursive frame of the political that skipped or systematically misrepresented their presence and contribution. Despite strong academic

³ Soraya Morayef. "The Seven Wonders of the Revolution." *Jadaliyya*. 22nd March 2012. <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4776/the-seven-wonders-of-the-revolution>. Last access: 29th August 2016. See also Morayef's blog, Suzee in The City, www.suzeeinthecity.wordpress.com, and the censored book *Revolutionary Graffiti: Street Art of the New Egypt* (AUC Press 2012) by Cairo-based journalist Mia Gröndahl, for an overview of Egyptian revolutionary street art.

research on the long historical trajectory of the Egyptian women's movement (Badran 1996; Al-Ali 2000; Baron 2007) – one of the oldest movements in the region, including the Mediterranean – women protestors have become increasingly marginalized in public representations, and explicitly alienated from the political arena (Sholkamy 2012). A patriarchal, “masculinist” understanding of gender has been “restored” (Kandiyoti 2013) and turned against women activists, in particular since the widespread upheavals of 2011.

In this respect the women's movement in Egypt exemplifies how a patriarchal and militarized fantasy of the nation-state, rather than retreating with the neoliberalization of the economy, becomes its support. The affective connotation attached to gender hierarchies, in order to make them valuable, is not simply ideological or representational, but reproductive at a societal level: engendering material, symbolic and emotional hierarchies of oppression simultaneously, and silencing (or pacifying) active dissidents in ways that cannot be easily dismantled through critical deconstruction alone (Navaro-Yashin 2002). I suggest in the following chapters that the state manipulation of the affective and material capital of gender – both in everyday life and as part of nationalist politics – has given new meanings to women's activism and gender struggles.

To think about the relationship between gender and nationalism is to think about how nationalism and the postcolonial state are not only reproduced but also challenged and shattered: how they are transformed and how they are confirmed. How can feminist and women's rights activists construct change through gender, when gender is institutionally played with – through representations, discourses and practices – to flout the desire and practice of change, and to reinstate a hegemony in crisis? The main question in this thesis entails choosing to read women activists' practices, symbols, emotions, objects and places – what can be called “affective nodes” – as a relational part of neocolonial and nationalist history. The value given to the relational dependence between change and gender – at the intersection of political subjectivities and nation-making processes in the particular locality of post-2011 Cairo – is the conceptual core of this research.

While relying on Maxine Molyneux's (1998) definition of women's movement as characterized by tactics promoting practical, short-term aims or strategic, long-term interests, I also try in this thesis to expand this definition. Often there is no clear-cut separation or boundary between these two sets of objectives, since the political field itself is elusive and fleeting. Not only does the political field touch the intimate lives of the women and their subjectivities – as much as official histories or struggles, and their connections to other struggles – but it develops from those particular gendered formations. Women activists are not a niche or an anecdote inside the larger activist movement. Their experiences and accounts push, quite

materially too, from within and against the confining boundaries of feminine belonging and womanhood produced in the political field. As gender is deployed to signify the collision between the political and the personal at a moment when women's groups are often being closed down or prevented from continuing their activities, the arena where women's rights and feminist groups move, and where they challenge the hegemonic boundaries between "personal" and "political", is an interpretative category without smooth contours and with much in between.

II. Situating the context: the public and intimate lives of the nation-state

II.i Political fantasies of gender and the state

As simultaneously "within" (as subjects belonging to Egypt) and "without" (as critical and abjected subjects) the Egyptian nation-state, the position of women activists often seemed much misunderstood. It brought to the surface the complexities of Cairo, the locality where the women operated and which transformed my fieldwork, spanning about 10 months between October 2012 and December 2013.

I started my fieldwork in late 2012, planning an overview of the current young activists' movements for women's rights in their online and offline activities, before and after the revolution. The structured picture I had in my mind collapsed quickly after my arrival in Cairo. Rather than clear structures, defined protest sites and solid networks, a very intricate and tense scenario formed in front of me. Nets of gendered meanings and affective presences enveloped particular objects, spaces and bodies in the city: each reminded me how political change and intimate belonging could be made, as well as shattered, at an individual and national level. I let go of the ideas of change and identity I had naively carried with me to Egypt, as a UK-based doctoral student from insular postcolonial Italy, enjoying some of the privileges of the foreigner in the largest African metropolitan area.

The stasis in Tahrir Square was only apparent. The city was in a highly politicized and volatile situation between 2012 and 2013, when I lived there, and still is today. The "Middle Eastern exceptionalism" (LeVine 2005), that is the political apathy, underlined by reports (UNDP Arab Human Development Report 2002) and diplomatic dispatches was defeated daily (Bayat 2010). Protests have now become much more difficult following the protest law (Act 107/2013), yet this has not diminished the political field: from chats in a '*ahwa* (coffee shop) to social charity, to the street talk of traders and beggars, politics in Cairo continues to embrace a wide set of practices, discourses, gestures and jokes. Despite the more or less temporary ruination of major sites of protests, politics filled every part of the city with its refractions: the surveillant eye of defence and security apparatuses; the ramifications of government; the media spotlight

that selected and magnified events as they happened; the women in the open in the city, at home, working, walking. Among the latter, groups of young women had caught my attention for reasons which were not initially fully conscious.

Like the domain of “public life” described by Navaro-Yashin in her study of the Turkish state (Navaro-Yashin 2002), this varied ensemble in Egypt transcends its division into different “public spheres” to be a complex arena that engenders the political in ambivalent ways. The common object of political contention – the nation-state in Egypt – put all parts in the same domain. Thus Aliaa, a prominent young feminist activist, mentioned to me in 2013 that it was the state that was the object of activist attention: “Sure, ideally we all want the revolutionary state... the state of the permanent revolution. But this is not the state we have to deal with now.” At a time when institutional complacency is being confronted with violence targeting activists and supporters of alternatives to the current El Sisi regime, any critique of the reshaping of the Egyptian state and the dilemmas of its political life needs to see young women activists not only as disturbing the regime, but also as questioning the gendered nature of the political.

In Egypt, distinct actors – the people, institutions, the elite, and activist groups – often assumed antagonist positions. All of them however, like the chess pieces in El Teneen’s street art, established the common political matter of public life in the object of the nation-state: authoritarianism, militarism, Islamist rhetoric and morality, economic inequality, everyday oppression as well as international conflicts are central to defining public life. I understand the political as the relationship entertained with the nation-state, to which the various parts of public life are attached, rather than as the reciprocal conflicts between those parts. Here, the state emerges differently. It does not only appear as a discursive product whose centre is elusive and untraceable, as Timothy Mitchell suggested (Mitchell 1990, 1991a). Its existence is enabled by the way the parts imagine, feel, touch and move with the nation, for instance through commodities, mass protests, and performances of belonging in the square and online. The life of the state and its attachments survive, even when the parts are not interested in or directly acting for radical political or social change (Mahmood 2005; Bayat 2010; Ahmed 2011), and even when nationalism ignores certain subjects as unfitting or silences them as subversive.

As explored in much of Navaro-Yashin’s work on the faces of the state in Turkey and Cyprus (Navaro-Yashin 2002, 2012), central to these many lives of the state is the psychic force of fantasy – a particular version of the Lacanian attachment to an object that the subject knows is pathological and detrimental but with which it perseveres nonetheless. The attachment to the state, notwithstanding critiques and attacks, keeps it alive. The issue in this sense is not to prove whether radical political change or revolution (disregarding any possible failure) may be

of no interest to some groups when massive societal forces seem to converge towards discourses and practices of transformation. Rather, it is about which material and immaterial modulations, in the wide domain of the political, constructed change and its limits as desirable during the upheaval and remaking of Egypt, and for which subjects: what imagination became real and embodied, and what reality was fantasized, to support a new life of the state. This move took into account a milieu where gender intersected with sexual, class and racial differences (Elyachar 2010) in demanding social justice, freedom and dignity for the nation and individuals alike. The post-revolutionary fantasy of the state – which reinforced the state position after the spectacular end of Mubarak and Morsy – grew in particular through gendered references that connected intimate experiences of sexuality, gender identity and family life to the public field of the political.

II.ii The nationalist rescue of the state: gender as meta-capital

To look for the points of contact between gender and the Egyptian nation-state would be a misunderstanding: the two are not separate categories that relate to each other, but rather they doubly engender each other in political and social ways. The configuration that I experienced during my fieldwork in Egypt suggested that the nation returned as the intimate other of the Egyptian state: it is not its synonym, a conflating layer or an enemy, but its conjoined element. The hyphen between them can be seen as a wedding ring, with current President El Sisi as the groom, the masculine body of the state.⁴ During my 10 months in Cairo and my later research, the nation-state was not abstract at all. It linked Egypt to the President as a married couple in front of cheering people; it felt entitled to condemn women protestors as abjected daughters, or to accuse ill-fitting lower-class men of being sexual predators. Between 2012 and 2016, relations with the Egyptian nation-state generated political and social identities in gendered language and terms: it produced, valued and politically ignored national gendered bodies in everyday practices, talk, institutional places (such as before the law) and heightened moments. Imaginings, feelings and actions in relation to the nation-state after 25th January 2011 closely bound the political to gender.

This shift was not casual. The 18 days of 2011 saw a peak of political and social scepticism towards the state, which extended later to its *feloul* (“remnants”, referring to the “old regime” of Mubarak). The circumscribed support Hosny Mubarak temporarily won by stating he would proudly die for his Egypt (for instance, among interlocutors in the popular neighbourhood of Al-Zawya in Ghannam 2011) quickly terminated after the violent repression he ordered in late January and early February. A similar sentiment was replicated in the summer of 2013. The

⁴ I will explore this topic in detail in Chapter II.

2011 chant “*El-shab ureed isqaat el-nizam*” (“the people want the fall of the regime”) beat the rhythm of all protests in subsequent years, and became a much more imperative “*irhal*” (“leave!”) directed at the weak masculinity of President Morsy and his troubled rule (Ghannam 2013). During this historical window, the widespread radical contestation of authoritarianism declared a new relationship with the state – an object depending on the “we” of the people – which influenced the formation of political subjectivities and the gendered terms of their national belonging. The conflict over gender was in fact central to the contestation of public life in particular after 2011.⁵ The nation came to the rescue of the state by privileging patriarchal and militarized affective understandings of gender as the axis structuring political struggles and subject formation – together with class, race, age and religion.

Nationalisms globally show powerful ways through which gender and sexuality impress various degrees of value on bodies, belonging and property, in an apparent equality based on the idea of sharing the same blood in the same land. Representations, practices, affects and discourses of Egypt as a woman fall into the complex mould of nationhood and gender to which feminists have brought attention (Kandiyoti 1991; Yuval-Davis 1997). But the Egyptian nation-state in the heated years following 2011 aimed at the transformation and control of not only material but also immaterial means to reproduce society. This relevance is neither symbolic nor social nor economic: it is all three. The crucial meaning of gender relations, in the contested political moment Egypt had been living since 2011, were similarly transformed between 2012 and 2013 into a meta-capital – the faculty of altering power relations and the fantasy of the state – in the service of the establishment of governing relations. Egypt as “the mother of the world” offered a potent gendered repository of affects – some familiar, some less so – that could engender political subjectivities together with individual gendered identities, linked to a new shape of the nation-state. The Egyptian women’s movement, and in particular the groups born in the years preceding or right after January 2011, entered this configuration and introduced a break in this specific gendered political and social locality.

II.iii The nation-state screen: deflecting affects, gender and change in Egypt

The affective modulations and intensities that sustained these shifts, and the gendered matrixes that engendered them, say a great deal about the return of a strong nationalist state in Egypt and the status of gender struggles in post-revolutionary Egypt. Whereas affects surge from a relation given only between an object and a subject (Ahmed 2004), the nation-state is not an object or a subject like any other. It is both an object (for the subjects that relate to it in public life) and a subject (which defines its objects as national subjectivities). This relationship

⁵ Groups against sexual harassment started around the mid-2000s, but gained popularity after 2011. For more on this, see Chapter V.

constituted the nation-state and its subjects as each other's objects of desire (Aretxaga 2002) – particularly gendered. In the next chapters I will explore how affects – with their encroachments on bodily reactions, urban spaces and objects – hint at the emotional force with which the state (more than ever in Egypt, the nation-state) constitutes the subjectivities of its people, and at how the subjects too give life to what the state is (Navaro-Yashin 2002).

As mentioned earlier, the mode of attachment to the state is what constitutes the “psychic life of power” (Butler 1997b): the substance of the state-subject relationship is reinforced or weakened by a fantasy rich in contradictions (Aretxaga 2002). Any affective relationship with the nation-state does not only rely heavily on gender relations and hierarchies, but also maintains their reciprocal dependence for its own survival. It needs a complex material world where political subjectivities and the state can be touched, seen, felt and remembered – even when destroyed or changed. As in the commons of bodily gesture for the lower-class *sha'bi* Cairo of Elyachar (2011; also Schielke 2008, 2009) or the public life of Istanbul for Navaro-Yashin (2002), the politics of gendered affects in Cairo are also materially embodied and shared communally, albeit not completely consciously. Imagination, projections, fantasies, desires, emotions, stories, consumption and bodily reactions about the nation-state, and similarly about gender, are pulled from objects, bodies and places that are related to each other.



“Fear Us, Government!”. Keizer. Cairo. 2012.⁶

⁶ Photo courtesy of Keizer. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/keizerstreetart/6916075729/in/pool-middleeaststreetart/>. Last access: 15th July 2016.

The circulation of these affects (Ahmed 2004) moves at times through sliding from affect to affect. Passing from – for instance – hate to love (or in the case of Egypt, from fear to love for the state and its apparatuses) for Ahmed changes both the object, which is invested by the attachment, and the subject herself. In the fantasy that sustains the nation-state – a shared object in which each member of society is invested in gendered terms – “sliding affects” also operate through a series of sliding objects, and conversely transformed subjects. The sustainability of the complex military, neoliberal and neocolonial design of the new governance in Egypt identifies in gender, intimacy and sexuality the screens where the fantasy of the nation-state plays out its own reproduction and desirability – its grounds for happiness and growth, for fear and decay, upon which other actors and forces capitalize. Halfway throughout my fieldwork, in July 2013, to restore the “will of the people” betrayed by the Islamist government, a distinct patriarchal understanding of the nation as in need of protection “slid” in, invoked and mobilized to justify the military intervention. The collision of militarism and economic interests used the nation as a shield against which particular gendered desires and expectations were deflected and channelled into a fantasy of the state embodied by the military. Women actively involved in the square were portrayed insofar as they showed support for the man-state and the woman-nation: the micro and macro level of reproduction converged, redrawing the “red line” between the political and the personal. A patriarchal formation of gender roles propelled the psychic fantasy that sustained attachment to the nation; the slide into the military state expressed a sense of control and protection that simulated change and absorbed the threat of women protestors who were claiming more than a “mother role” in making the nation-state.

II.iv Gendered affects as a diagnostic of resistance

The capacity of fantasies to affectively and bodily “haunt” (Navaro-Yashin 2012: 15–17) the present through objects, and also through stories about them, concerns public life in all its parts. As contrasting fantasies emerge, though, and compete with each other – around the same objects, bodies and narratives – to elicit different affective nodes, how is conceptualizing resistance meaningful for the interpretation of Egyptian women’s groups in their dialectic with the nation-state over gender as a tool of change? De Certeau (1984) defined resistant tactics as actions of the weak, akin to Scott’s (1985) “weapons of the weak”. They are determined by “an absence of a proper locus” and played out “in the space of the other” by using opportunistically – rather than owning – the “cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers” (De Certeau 1984: 36–37). More than capturing unconformable practices, De Certeau pays attention to spaces of social transformation and changes of meaning. As Tilly (1984) argued from a historical perspective, collective actions

change their repertoire of contention through time – not always coherently, and more or less slowly according to the successes and routines of the tactics. Resistance is characterized then as shape- and meaning-shifting (Abu Lughod 1990; Gal 1995; Mitchell 1990;; Ortner 1995).

Lila Abu Lughod (1990) revisited her work in Egypt, and through it discussed the Foucauldian proposition that power and resistance are essentially linked. She frames resistance as in a dynamic and mobile relationship with power. While maintaining an understanding of resistance not dissimilar to De Certeau's tactics as performances, she also underlines how regimes of power and governmentality are productive of subjectivities, spaces for agency and understanding. For her, Bedouin women's poetry, performed for their own circles out of men's sight, can be understood as a resistant practice of identity-making: neither as oppositional nor to overturn men, but to re-establish the boundaries within which power can be exercised and dignified in their community.

Resistance here is conceptually helpful to diagnose power (Abu Lughod 1990: 42) and to understand how it can be arranged in different conjunctions. Interpreted as a force for re-establishing boundaries in the field of political life I described earlier, resistance depends on the way the object of the political – the nation-state – is articulated and affectively charged. The nature of the change Abu Lughod and De Certeau mention is here elaborated as an affective modulation that shifts the relationship, and the boundaries, between the subject and the nation-state. As I will explore in the next chapters, the Egyptian nation-state translated affects into a technology of governance through the value of gender. Wary of romances of resistance, to change and transform hierarchies of oppression means in Cairo to produce, conceptualize and experience power in this affective management. The conflictual position of many women activists stands against the nation-state's capitalization of gendered imaginations, intimate relations, practices, bodies and spaces, with its purpose of producing relationships of domination that fragment dissent, restructure authoritarianism and ultimately restrict the field of public life.

As part of public life and its hierarchies, any insistence on transforming the Egyptian social and political context is formed in and limited by an already given intertwinement of class, age, gender, race and religion. Yet women activists' tactics are not generic and bureaucratic reactions to hegemonic power, nor are they just opposing institutions. Rather they enter into the management of affective states to remodulate their intensity or make them slide; to change, therefore, the production of the object nation-state and the process of subjectification. Like a chord that engenders gender and the nation, they tune into this resonance differently, engendering different relations between national subjectivities and the nation-state – which is also to say, transforming the subject and object. Some of this

“retuning” and “sliding” may “vibrate” within known activist tactics, objects and spaces, such as art or internet platforms, where women activists may tweak acquired gendered meanings and affects. Other “retunings” more radically tackle gender constructions and sexuality, for instance by organizing women’s protests, cycling freely on busy roads or discussing the gender interplay in sexual violence. In both cases women activists force open the affective limits that define power, its subjection and resistance. Activism on women’s and gender issues hence provides diagnostic insights into the social and political articulation both of the struggles of the nation-making process and of gender relationships and identities as they emerge as spheres of political and social conflict. They put at stake the limits of feminist affects and the meaning of feminist change in a postcolonial, neoliberal, authoritarian context.

In the wake of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary trajectories, the significance of tracing the most recent forms of young Egyptian activism on women’s rights lies in the potency of their affective modulations – as remapping bodies and spaces, re-meaning objects and actions, and remaking subjectivities and nationalist belonging. On the one hand their affective interventions – emotional and bodily at once – highlight the potential of social transformations embedded in gendered practices. On the other hand the diagnosis they offer is also about unchanging structures of oppression: how gender profoundly colours and structures intersectional experiences of violence, power and the labour of maintaining an authoritarian political and social status quo.

II.v Affects: material and immaterial entanglements in the field

The affects elaborated upon in this thesis are examined and analysed as gendered “nodes”: that is, as gendered entanglements of spaces, emotions, bodily reactions and practices. They belong to, but also expand, the notions of affective states, coined by Ann Stoler (2004), and structures of feeling, coined by Raymond Williams (1977). Stoler refers to affects to describe the colonial state’s attempts to “culturally standardize the organization of feelings” (Stoler 2004: 9). These go in parallel with Williams’s structures of feeling (Williams 1977), which are ways of feeling and interpreting reality that fall outside of or modify hegemonic ideologies. These aspects of hegemonic institutions and everyday life respectively are not separate: they live, die and manifest in the same material world – although they encounter it through different relations and dynamics. They form different nodes.

Throughout the 10 months of my fieldwork, affects enveloped the material ground and the struggles through which they manifested themselves. For instance, nationalist violence and paternal military protectiveness scared or excited passers-by, who would take pictures of tanks while being affected by the curfew; body surfaces subtly manifested dissent against regimes of

gender control (for instance, by wearing heels at protests); stories of sexual violence, of feminist joy and grief, were made visible and touchable through artworks on city walls, underground train carriages and websites. Both material and immaterial, affective nodes give distinctive access to the gendered processes of national political change, the workings that sustain the cultivation of nationalist affects, and the contested articulation of gendered subjectification. In this sense, affects are the ground where my encounters tried to extract gender from the hold of nationalism and to resignify its value in everyday life and in relation to the political field, as sexual bodies and gendered identities. It is a labour, which is material as much as emotional. “Affective labour” is here a useful term. It was coined by Hardt and Negri (2005: 108-111) to describe how affects have gained increasing importance in the contemporary labour market (such as smiling at customers). Silvia Federici (2006) has critiqued this notion of “affective labour” (which she identifies with feelings and emotions, although Hardt and Negri separate the two concepts) on the grounds that it conceals feminist critiques of material reproductive work.

In my understanding, these dynamics instead methodologically reflect each other and their reproductory labour. Instead of focusing on a single vantage point, such as the state or the women’s movement, through affects I explore what produces and sustains both: a semiconscious emotional and bodily commons that structures the politics of gender in everyday life and of particular moments of political making. I look at affective nodes as an “in-between” structure – tying emotions and bodily reactions, stories and spaces, the unconscious and the conscious – that sheds light on a historic moment in contemporary Egypt characterized by the gendering of political subjectivities and the politicization of gendered subjects. Unavoidably, the experiential in-betweenness had an impact on the methods and the variety of data I chose, to reflect on myself as a researcher and in making sense of my subjects’ stories and practices in my writing.

III Research methodology and methods: doing fieldwork during contestation

III.i Framing the revolutionary fieldwork

A peculiar affective and imaginative attachment to January 2011 – manifested by the women’s rights activists and feminist groups that emerged right before or after it – makes this research as concerned with time as it is with spaces in the post-revolutionary fieldwork. Looking at the revolution as a critical shift in social and political reproduction I am aware of the difficulty of defining the Egyptian revolution as such. Beinín and Vairel critique as bound to fail any predictions about the preconditions of a revolution in Egypt, as well as any attempts to evaluate its outcomes in the short term instead of focusing on its dynamics of mobilization

(Beinin and Vairel 2011). Political scientists have often tried to predict revolutions and classify the variables that lead to them, such as political dysfunctions and deep deprivation (Moore 1966; Skocpol 1979; Goldstone 1993). But as Charles Tilly (1993) emphasises, all revolutions have in common the fact that they follow no rules and that their contexts uniquely influence their eruption.

Critical events emphasize that the reworking of categories is at the centre of the reproduction of the Egyptian neoliberal nation-state in a period of turmoil. In all of the accounts I collected from my subjects, January 2011 was uncontested as “the revolution” because it changed the ways of producing gender, politics and national identity. What changed was the relationship between these, and especially the relationship subjects entertained with the nation-state, and with each other, defined through gendered terms.

Although some friends and acquaintances expressed doubts that a revolution had actually happened as a social and individual transformation, the revolution of January 2011 was a turning point for each of my interviewees’ lives and activism. Regardless of their presence or absence in the square, in my interviews the mass protests after 2011 were the milestones around which other memories and identities were often rearranged. Even during the times when Tahrir looked like an erased monument, January 2011 was the historical reference point that gave daily life a new political meaning, and in some cases catalysed previous experiences of protest. Individual experiences and practices converged in a wider sense of historical agency and political direction. The revolution of 2011 was described as eliciting the sense of belonging to a community; as pushing one to engage with society as successful protests continued; as inspiring the refusal of sexual violence in everyday life, as well as of political violence; as exposing the complicity of the state and society in the military virginity tests and violence perpetrated against women protestors.

The affective attachment to specific moments of feminist consciousness – joyous, angry, proud, fearless – and their continuation in the present reveal how the revolution is not only defined as an imaginative or mnemonic landmark in experiences of women’s activism. It is also tangible in its inscription in their bodies, beaten, violated, or left free to move; in the urban and domestic spaces of their lives, ruined, militarized, covered in murals since those days; in what they strategize creatively; in the significance of their relationships. January 2011 represented not simply a temporal sign, but a mutation in the interlinking of affective nodes, materiality, political belonging and the constitution of gendered subjectivities. Even though I was not present during the 18 days of upheaval in Egypt, in my own experiences of protests in 2012 and 2013 I perceived the gendered dimensions of the revolution my interviewees shared with me, and the contrast between different fantasies of the state.

Events alone cannot work without a materiality that evokes their emotional content and makes their transformed categories present. Specific urban spaces give this revolutionary temporality collective, solid forms: Tahrir is perhaps the most important display in recent Egyptian history of political change in bricks and mortar, but it is not the only one. These spaces exercise an effect on the bodies around them and create waves of presences – as well as interstitial fractures – that mutate the gendered politics of everyday life. The militarization of Cairo and of the region at large that followed the demise of President Morsy in 2013, and the rearrangement or destruction of walls in Tahrir, manifest attempts to co-opt this effect in order to sustain a certain relation with the nation-state – to sustain another fantasy. Revolutionary temporality and spaces fuelled alternative gendered fantasies of the nation-state; they were embodied as subjectivities and materialized in specific places and objects, which contrasted with the fantasy evoked by hegemonic practices and ideologies. The constant resurfacing of January 2011 in women activists' stories, material objects and spaces, and its affective persistence (even as a delusional fetishism), more than its origin or outcomes, made me decide on the use of the word “revolution” in this research. It also pushed the research towards multiple elements – emotions, objects, visual art and personal insights – as interpretive tools.

III.ii Messy research: doubting gender meanings and interpretation

How to ethnographically study a “messy” situation and field of research, as Abu Lughod (2005: 195) and Navaro-Yashin (2002: 3) emphatically ask? My 33 subjects and I felt profoundly that we needed interpretative instruments so as not to lose grasp of the historical magnitude of the events that were happening, and so as to live the intersectional, personal experience of it. As either members or founders of women's rights groups – where for some gender issues, rather than only women's issues, were at stake – or as engaged with a certain continuity in the activities of women-centred groups, all my informants attempted to alter and manifest gender issues. They did so through multiple practices, objects and affective claims – even when not immediately explicit – that engaged with the nation-state. The degree of organization, the forms of definition of women's and gender issues, their strategies and their relation with the nation-state varied and will be explored in the next chapters. However, their common and simultaneous emphasis in the gendered potential of actions, spaces, fantasies and stories – to change the structure and relations of social and political reality – sets them apart. The variety of their approaches in this sense was distinctive with regard to other forms of activism and other forms of women's participation in protest, politics and public engagement which for instance turned more narrowly to human rights, development approaches or labour struggles.

This in turn also implies a specific take the nation-state assumes in addressing young activists who use gender as a tool for changing dominant meanings and structures.

However, Doaa, an experienced feminist activist and workshop leader, mentioned her discomfort at explaining what exactly the historical moment meant to her. She later wrote in a piece online that "revolutions do not give answers; they only raise questions that may not have answers yet".⁷

Doaa's words expressed what some other interviewees, such as young Christine, the founder of an anti-harassment group, said about understanding the post- and counter-revolutionary present: "it does not make sense." But this discomfort flags that discursive critiques of the state and discourses about a freer Egyptian society may be limited for an analysis of the survival of existing relations of oppression. The deconstruction of representations and discourses may not dismantle the "master's house" (Lorde 1984) and can actually continue to engender it (Navaro-Yashin 2012). Hence the presence of semiconscious, non-discursive components – as essential to tactics of change as they are to the survival of the contradictory directions in the formation of Egyptian national identities – is significant in recently formed feminist and women's groups, for instance in bodily strategies, dissonant affects, street art and online archives.

Postmodern ethnography has emphasized the vagueness of experiential anthropology. Famously, Joan W. Scott argued that "Language is the site of historical enactment" (1991: 793). For her, practices, embodiment and experiences have become fragile and contested concepts – unsuitable sites of historical transformation. Instead, Turner's study of performances (Turner 1986) explains that "historical enactments" can take the form of non-discursive practices, feelings, desires and motivations that form subjectivities – like those Doaa pointed out (Turner 1974, 1986). Within feminist discourses, this is valid for researchers as well. The women activists and I were all (different) parts of the same context. I could not avoid reporting a sensorial and experiential engagement with the field (Pink 2009): for instance, the "passing" of my body among other bodies and objects in the city, the unconscious picking up of mannerisms, the choice of clothing, the way of walking (mostly of crossing roads), the meanings given to the bodily attitudes of people I came across; but also the spaces where the other bodies and I moved, the walls we saw and those that blocked us, the roads and tanks that were feared and celebrated. Language alone therefore does not suffice in this analysis: "Decolonizing gender" – or subtracting it from colonial binaries and objectification – "is

⁷ Doaa Abdelaal, "A Revolution Asks Questions". *Building Peace*. March 2014. <http://buildingpeaceforum.com/2014/03/a-revolution-asks-questions>. Last access: 3rd December 2014. Doaa had stated this position in her interview with me in late 2013.

necessarily a practical task” (Lugones 2010: 746). The perception, making and interpretation of societal shifts is woven in words as much as it is in often subversive non-verbal practices and environments.

III.iii An ethnographer on the authoritarian map: positionality and postcolonialisms

If “revolution” was the word that opened up compelling worlds of change in Egypt, the word for non-change I heard often during my fieldwork in Cairo was “fascism”, whether referring to the Muslim Brotherhood, the government, the army or the police. Coming from the country where fascism was born and where it maintains its hold after decades, I always felt affected by the too-familiar world the word evoked.

I grew up in Sardinia in the 1980s and '90s, just after the end of the violent terrorist acts and state violence of the so-called Years of Lead. Fascism was taught in school as a distant spectre – a lighter and less cruel version of Nazism. Its remains – monuments to dead soldiers, houses, towns built by dissidents, the persecution of opponents such as Emilio Lussu and Antonio Gramsci, born in Sardinia – were left for our eyes to decide what to see. It was seldom presented as a current incarnation of authoritarianism, exploitation and military colonization which still divides a mostly rural, strategic island in the Mediterranean.

In the '80s, incidentally, feminist associations in Italy were closing down, apparently having won all their battles. As elsewhere, these advancements were superficial and oppression was occulted behind a legal system which did not mention political torture, gender-based violence or inequality.

I did not have the historical instruments or direct experience to prove whether the comparison with authoritarianism in Egypt was wrong or right, nor to compare different vernacular versions of Mediterranean feminisms. My experiences as a white woman researcher of the protests, shots and curfew in Cairo in between 2012 and 2013 made me acutely relive the perils and past stories of gendered and political conflict that run in my family, and brought back to me the groups and protests I had attended in Sardinia and London. During my fieldwork, some daily experiences and historical events around me could be defined as serendipitous, as Geert De Neve (2006) writes of Frank Pieke’s research in China (Pieke 2000). Pieke’s fieldwork was completely transformed by the outbreak of the People’s Movement in 1989 (Pieke 2000: 129–150). Similarly, the summer of 2013 – when millions of Egyptians took to the squares again, and a military coup subverted the elected government – readdressed my research considerably. I could no longer differentiate between life and fieldwork, since both were marked by overwhelming uncertainty and doubts, and rare illuminations.

Perhaps my interest in affects as a potentiality for both political change and stagnation stems from my personal experience that there is as much in sites of protests and stories as in marginalized objects and phantom presences. As for the women activists I met in Egypt, feminist and post/anti-colonial theories gave new meanings to known experiences, as well as to unknown, silent ones which could be felt even if they were unspoken – which I inherited semiconsciously. Belonging to our past as much as to our present and potential future, these meanings attracted each other in a novel map. As Aliaa told me when we first met and I expressed my doubts about my research: “We are from the South; that’s how we understand each other.” The comment was not a culturalist view of the Mediterranean people united by a peculiar affective warmth. Coming from a region as close to mine in subalternity as in the political economy of its neighbouring interests, Aliaa perceived a common, unspeakable resonance that could help us to connect, feel and act upon realities through silence and open dissidence alike. Efforts, dialogues, bodily practices and emotions sprang from our renegotiation of our “place in the world” – mine and my interviewees – while we were living precariously and struggling against patriarchy. In between the different times and sites of our “meridian” postcolonial feminisms, these maps made this research worthwhile.

III.iv The struggle of doing feminist ethnography in post-revolutionary Cairo: ethics in research

By positioning myself as coming from a milieu which – although different – presented familiar subalternities, including in activist strategies such as protest murals, I do not intend to soften the uneasiness of my position in the “messy” post-revolutionary field. This sense of being “betwixt and between” (Turner 1969: 107) – an outsider who happened to share experiences of subalternity, militarization and postcoloniality, as well as the privileges of the excellent education provided at the most liberal university and department in the UK – was not resolved by seeking comfort in feminist methodologies.

From the beginning of my fieldwork, I asked myself daily the question both Stacey (1988) and Abu-Lughod (1990) asked more than two decades ago: can there be a feminist ethnography? The openness of possible answers – concerning methods and the epistemologies that ground them – to this critical question emphasized for me how troubling and unsettling it still is. Furthermore, I battled to interpret a reality which was fractured, unstable and risky.

Researching women’s rights and living in Cairo after 2011 was a privilege subjected to great frustrations, obstacles, pain and often risks. The colonial danger of my research surfaced in my constant fears of othering my subjects as “Middle Eastern women” vis-à-vis my own version of “feminism”, or of erasing our differences under the cloak of “postcolonial” feminism. External critiques ranged from academic dismissal – considering women’s activism in Cairo after 2011 a

minor “niche” among larger political groups such as labour movements and unions – to accusations that I was riding the trendy neo-orientalist reification of women in the Middle East which Western countries craved, either through colonizing and patronizing attitudes or by adhering to an unconditional “admiration” for “freedom fighters”. I lived my genuine interest with constant doubts: I could not avoid feeling guilty about the exploitative aspects research can involve. I was deeply concerned that I might betray the trust given to me, mistakenly report what my subjects told me or experienced, and put them and myself in danger, turning their experiences into signifiers of my own category of freedom. Solidarity was a hard balance to strike – even when my interviewees had more privileged conditions, and even within the sense of familiarity Cairo made me feel.

Feminist postcolonial scholars such as Mohanty (1988, 2003), Ong (1987) and Visweswaran (1994) all insist that any analysis of women’s oppression needs the voices of subalterns, since women do not experience oppression in the same way. Challenging the assumed transparency of colonial culture when subaltern “Third World women” are spoken for and about as victims without agency, Mohanty et al. 1992) argue that the category of Third World women can be representative when used by women themselves to emphasize what connects stories in different sites. Ong (2001) also advocates challenging the colonial practice of “othering” subaltern women, for instance by letting them express their own notions of development. She recognizes that the researcher’s privileged position may nonetheless be strategically helpful to produce at least “partial truths”, which although inevitably charged with issues of representation will be less dangerous than all-embracing truths (2001: 114–116). These positions remain problematic, however. Spivak (1988) argues that, just like Western and postcolonial intellectuals, Third World academics and representatives are not exempt from biases and interests, and are invested in the construction of subalternity (and of its cultural history) from their own political and epistemological positions. To reify “truth” as an authentic property owned by “Third World women”, and to claim to represent it disinterestedly, is bound to delusion.

The feminist and women activists I interviewed did not need me, or my help, to make their political voices heard: they were also not representative of the totality of activists, or of women activist, or of Egyptian women. Most of them, although at the early stages of their careers and activism, were more privileged than the majority of Egyptians, had articulated stances, and were astutely using platforms to make themselves heard. Many feminist and rights activists were already producing sophisticated research and publications, in order to advance their cause in Egypt and abroad by legal means, to support their campaigns with strong data, and to seek funds and allies. They were conscious of their own self-representation

and of the power conditions of knowledge production and dissemination about them, including trust and authority (Radcliffe 1994; Minh-ha 1989).

But feminist struggles do not exist in a vacuum: they also develop with contacts and support. Through these, national stories and local struggles link up with other struggles, movements and strategies, such as artistic projects. Angela Davis's visit to Egypt in the 1980s (Davis 1990) and Nadjé Al-Ali's visits to Egypt and Iraq since the 1990s (Al-Ali 2000, 2007, 2009) bridged personal activism and academic experience, and helped to shape research about feminism, gender, militarism and nation-making in transnational sites. From my own experience in Sardinia, bridging experiences of change was not only an intellectual curiosity but also an existential need. Intersectionality (Hill Collins 1990) in "representing others" recalls the commitment of postcolonial feminisms to social transformation and critical knowledge production. My choice to conduct feminist ethnography therefore does not come from a reassuring answer, but rather from hope for productive feminist engagement with struggles and conflicts – from the belief that at the core of feminist acts lies change.

III.v Reflexivity in making knowledge

How to practise feminist ethics in a highly contested field, where gendered constructions of political and social stasis and change are at stake? During the extensive precarization of my work, which continued into my writing-up years, ethical concerns always accompanied my ongoing privilege to conduct research. As conceptualized by Reinharz (1992), in response to Harding's (1987) pessimism as to the possibility of feminist method, there can be feminist methodologies and epistemologies, which affect feminist methods in three common aspects: a focus on the analysis of gender within the context of lived experience; a commitment to social change; a commitment to challenge the understanding of the relationship between the researcher and her subjects, and of the researcher's own subjectivity and agenda. In this sense, I considered my own power to be no less a part of the research and of social critique than my subjects. As a consequence, a commitment to reflexivity as a methodology (Oakley 1981; Wasserfall 1993) infused the de- and postcolonial feminism to which I felt I belonged. In between "insiderness" and "outsiderness", I occupied an ambivalent yet always privileged position. In my experience of disorder, in-betweenness and conflict opened up ways for me to understand the material, symbolic and affective structures of the state and women's groups together with my own position and structures. There was no aspect of my fieldwork which was untouched by gendered affects: I could not escape my own fears and enthusiasms, and I was constantly reminded of my own body in the city. Concern with issues of subjectivity and politics – within the research, and as the object of the research – required the incorporation of other methods. Hence to frame the interviews and ethnographic material that constitute the

core of this research I also relied on auto-ethnographic vignettes, and on images associated with the years 2011 to 2015. With the combination of these methods I hoped to tease out the complexity of the processes at play and of the ways they could be elaborated through non-verbal objects and emotions.

Auto-ethnography was a term coined by anthropologist Hayano (1979) in the context of Black Studies as the cultural story of one's "own people". It represents "the speaker/writer's discourse but in the language of the colonizer" (Lionnet 1990: 383; also McClaurin 2001: 65). Reed-Danahay (1997) for this reason calls auto-ethnography "autobiographical ethnography", in which auto-ethnographers interject personal experiences into ethnographic writing. More specifically, it is "an autobiographical genre or writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis and Bochner 2000: 739), "turning the ethnographic gaze inward on the self (auto), while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography, looking at the greater context wherein self experiences occur" (Denzin 1997: 227).

From the position of an outsider researcher, Rosaldo foreshadowed a critique: "present day's reflexivity is the tendency for the self-absorbed Self to lose sight altogether of the culturally different Other" (Rosaldo 1989: 7). In order to avoid misappropriation, McClaurin (2001) in fact recalls – in relation to Alice Deck's analysis of Zora Neale Hurston as a forgotten auto-ethnographic anthropologist (Deck 1990) – that writing and researching auto-ethnographically is not just reflexivity per se (which implies, in her view, a hierarchy of voices) and not just autobiography. It is "a particular type of reflexive form... simultaneously autobiographical and communal" (McClaurin 2001: 69).

The dilemma of alterity and reflexivity, of subjectivities and culture, of narrative stories and emotional and bodily experiences, does not have a definitive conclusion. These very notions are often construed in domains that are mutually implicated in everyday life. As affective nodes show, power is constantly under construction, negotiation and interpretation in determining "outside" and "inside" levels of subjectification and embodiment, often in the language of authenticity, nativity and modernity (Kandiyoti 1993). "Native" culture and the selves are debated – rather than taken for granted – in the relationality of existing social meanings and practices, which stitches together through affects the material consistency of experience and their narratives. Embodied practices in Egypt, together with discursive analysis, are a communal ground of signifiers – marked by class (Elyachar 2010), gender, race, age and location – as much as they are stories. Embodiment is "an existential condition in which the body is the subjective source or the intersubjective ground of experience" (Csordas 1999: 143): ethnographies explore embodied practices and experiences as socially constructed and owned

(Moore 1994: 28-48). My body was often objectified by the “natives” I encountered, as a woman, a foreigner, a researcher, in ways which I could not control. There is no final or conclusive relation with the material world, but rather a domain of everyday workings where gendered expectations and cultural anticipations are mixed with shifting productions of possibilities in the social and political field.

The “communal” work of auto-ethnographic data and observations, together with material culture, art, stories and personal participations, may help to reveal how the affective work of bodies, spaces, objects and feelings forms shifting relations of gendered oppression and patriarchal restoration in Cairo. Power dynamics will be reproduced in my own personal version of the dynamics of affective transformation between 2011 and 2015. I have found no other way to take care of what has been shared with me, and what I have lived, than to find different method keys to interpret it and feel these tangential connections.

The ways in which my subjects and I related to each other and to the state put me on the path of doing ethnography “barefoot” (Scheper-Hughes 1995). With this term Scheper-Hughes describes a “grounded” anthropology which not only tries “to be accessible to the people we say we represent”, but also aims to “make ourselves available as comrades” (Scheper-Hughes 1995: 440). There must be a continuous and conflict-ridden dialogue between ethics and the labour of fieldwork. I believe *because* there were irresolvable power imbalances shifting constantly between my interviewees and me, and because of the precarious grounds we all shared in doing research and confronting violence in Cairo, it was important to make a commitment not only in the fieldwork, but also and especially in the trajectory of this research in the long term. In Cairo, such commitment happened by sharing reciprocally during interviews; by being asked to help with the preparation of a seminar, which regrettably did not happen; in accepting and giving small acts of care during difficult times; in treating knowledge as much broader than only “academic”. Once the fieldwork was over, the responsibility of what to do with what had been given to me, and with my own experience, required a different kind of work and appraisal. A committed approach is sensitive to the relationality that lived experiences and practices can engender, stretching into the future. It takes risks by adopting a stance on both the researcher’s power and the subjects’ experience, knowing that ethnography will always be partial and create discontent (Al-Ali 2000).

IV. "Listen to me! We are Egyptian women"

IV.i Knowing and unknowing the subjects of my research

This commitment made me particularly wary of the selections I would make when researching the political engagement of newly formed women's groups and the gendered formation of nationalist subjectivities.

The mobilization of gendered practices and constructions of national identity could not be analysed ahistorically (Kandiyoti 1991) if I was going to problematize activism. A 2014 short video demonstrates how the enactment of "authentic" Egyptian womanhood was changing together with the gendered politics of the nation-state. The video, which quickly went viral, showed a middle-aged woman, Mona El-Beheiri, dressed conservatively in a *khimar* and likely from a humble background, addressing US President Barak Obama as one of the "Egyptian women"⁸ who supported El Sisi against American interference. Its success was preceded by the video "Harlem Shake", which teased the Muslim Brotherhood and the government in 2013 with a "decadent dance"⁹ imported from Western countries through which young Egyptian men questioned the "inauthentic" excesses of Islamist males. Reproduced on thousands of screens all over Egypt, the videos are part of the political "encroachments" (Bayat 2010) on everyday life: here the political helps to interpret reality and affects personal, cultural and social identities and relationships by establishing the limits of authenticity and modernity. But what is the chosen narrative of the nation-state, the object of the political, and how does this relate to affective management? The rise of repression, and the representation of women's activism in public life as a particular threat to the wholesome nation-state, created different conditions of possibilities for gendered political identities. This, at the same time, intersected with class, age, contexts and institutions in defining politics and notions of change for a wide variety of Egyptian women activists.

The subjects of my research were not representative of all engaged women, or all activists, in Egypt. Their conditions of possibilities were given by their belonging to the middle and upper classes in Cairo; their age, ranging from 20s to early 40s; their secular approach, with various positions concerning religious belonging, Islam, human rights and feminism; and their

⁸ Her words were: "Listen to me Obama: shut up your mouth, Obama! We are Egyptian women, Sisi yes, Sisi yes, Morsy no, Morsy no." Her catchphrase was popularly mocked. Noticeably, there was an implicit class dimension in the satire she was subjected to because of her poor English. See: "Shut up your MOUSE Obama." Youtube video, 0:14. Posted by yourbodyxtina. 1st March 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeBTyhN2Bu4> . Last access: 8th December 2014.

⁹ Gamal Nkrumah. "Harlem Shake." *Al-Ahram Weekly*. 6th March 2013. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/Print/1761.aspx>. Last access: 29th August 2016.

credibility among circles of activists. The women and male activists I encountered had dedicated time both to confronting the working of politics in gender and to pushing the working of gender into activism. Such conditions of possibilities also intercepted and allowed the production of my own conditions of possibility – of livelihood and study, and perhaps survival – in Cairo.

IV.ii Young feminists and women rights activists in Cairo

In their workplaces or in cafés in neighbourhoods such as Zamalek (where I lived for 10 months), Ma'adi, Mohandeseen, Heliopolis and Downtown, I interviewed 33 young activists between December 2013 and December 2014. I privileged relatively safe and easily reachable areas of central Cairo (apart from Heliopolis) in a vast and busy urban area of over 16 million people.

Founded by young activists, the formally constituted groups with which I had most contact were: Nazra for Feminist Studies, founded in 2007; Harassmap, started in 2010, although its founders had been actively involved in the field of women's rights with the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights since the early 2000s; and a newly established radical collective, which formally started in November 2013 but whose founders had been together as a group since the previous January, converging from several other experiences in the field. I also had contact with a young member of Women and Memory, a long-standing women's association which has seen a new generation of members in their 20s and early 30s joining the activities alongside its older founders. Some subjects had worked at women's rights groups – either new ones, such as Nazra, or old ones, such as the New Woman Foundation – but were now independent. Even if not employed at any of these at the time of the interview, they still participated in women's rights actions and were working on gender-based projects with other organizations.

Other interviews were conducted with members of organizations in the field of human rights or in art and media collectives: the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights; Human Rights Watch; UN WOMEN; the Bussy Project; and Mosireen. The majority of my interviewees were, or had been, members of more than one women's rights group or initiative including those mentioned above. This implied that they were employed in short and long-term roles within these groups. Volunteerism concerned a smaller number of interviewees: the intervention group Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment (OpAntiSH), started in 2013, whose activities are now on hold; and Baheya Ya Masr, founded in 2012 and also now on hold. Two subjects managed online anti-harassment pages and online women's pages; three were members of political parties and academia.

Beside interviews, I joined popular protests between November 2013 and June 2013, and I attended a small number of presentations and official meetings regarding women and gender at both mainstream institutions (such as UN Women) and activists' headquarters. Next to ethnographic observation *in situ*, I conducted online ethnography on the official websites and social media pages of the groups I contacted. I also followed my subjects' public online activities on social media platforms – in particular Facebook – which I interpreted in relation to their offline activities to better capture the continuities of their actions without privileging one over the other. Some of my auto-ethnographic notes also came from informal conversations in daily life, from my own experiences in the city, and from collecting recent archive material (newspaper articles and opinion pieces). These objects grounded my research on the affective management of the nation-state.

The high levels of instability and military surveillance made it quite difficult and risky to move freely around the area of Cairo, which worsened with the coup. In one case I erased a contact entirely, as a prominent activist warned me that the contact's name had come up on a list of police informants and they could be dangerous. I paid attention to where my interviewees and I felt more comfortable, and where meetings could happen safely, in a quiet environment: I made arrangements to grant this every time, even when it implied postponing the meeting. All the interviews but the first two were recorded: they were recorded in English, apart from some initial basic exchanges and introductions in Arabic. For safety and personal reasons I anonymized my informants, unless specifically asked not to do so.

My engagement inside groups was limited because of linguistic barriers, which did not allow me to volunteer and work for them. It was also very difficult for me, as an ethnographer, to contact a larger number of activists and develop deeper networks. I suffered for this failure in accessing the field, the reasons for which – legitimate diffidence, lack of gatekeepers, the life we were living in Cairo in the field of political and social change, my outsidership, politics of knowledge – made it impossible to interview feminist and women activists who were working class and/or older. Young activists, perhaps helped by our similar ages, were often more available to meet and talk to me, mostly in English. Not pursuing comparative work with older activists, as I had initially planned, let me concentrate on emerging initiatives created by young Egyptian women. It was, again, a configuration that my own existence as a particular ethnographer in the field both enabled and constrained in its possibilities.

IV.iii Anthropology of possibilities

Although particular gendered practices and symbolic aspects emerged as hegemonic, different gendered affective entanglements coexisted – intertwined with postcolonialism, neoliberalism,

racism, classism, religion and militarism – in defining relations with the state. It is this possible plurality that I examine through young women's rights activists. Gender is here an intersectional and relational field: in Connell's terms, "a social structure... a matter of social relations within which individuals and groups act" (Connell 2002: 9–10).

The exploration of initiatives on gender issues that were born or expanded thanks to the contribution of young women activists in the years immediately before and after the revolution is in the same spirit as the seminal work by Al-Ali (2000) on the Egyptian women's movement. In the "competing agendas" of Egypt (Badran 1991: 201), religion – especially Islam – occupies a central place, together with the state and women. Secular activists, independently of their faith and religious practice, do not identify with faith-based women's activism in a state which remains non-secular, and which still relies upon religious institutions to reinforce its cultural, social and political hegemony. The activists I met all engaged with religion as an axis of the political field, especially interacting with gender hierarchies. While they could define their personal identity and/or ethical motivation through religion, and could work in close collaboration with Islamic feminists, they all chose not to mention any religious position in the definition of their activism or rights work. This goes against essentializing notions of a clean division between the competing gendered agendas of "secularism" and "religion", whose content is constantly contested and recalibrated. I take the study of secular young women activists as informed by contestations, constructions and interpretations of the role of religion in relation to the nation-state and its cultural politics. I also see an opportunity to discuss the current shape of secular feminism and young women's activism in Egypt, whose current space seems under-researched and misunderstood compared with purely religious-based movements.

The increasing political pressure put on young women's rights activists, their incarceration and the unstoppable violence call into question even more strongly the gendered dimensions of the Egyptian nation-state as a whole, rather than just of activism. The significance of focusing on the women's movement in Egypt comes at a moment of growing acceptance of militarism and the economic and political aspects associated with the securitization of societies. The hegemonic power exercised by the "state" and its tentacular ramifications (Fahmy 2002; Mitchell 2002; Tadros 2006) have been represented throughout the last decades in Egypt by different and predominantly male figures: the presidents; the legislative, judiciary and executive establishment (with rare exceptions); the army; Islamist groups; and the Muslim Brotherhood during their short life as a political party and their longer existence as parapolitical organization. In Egypt, where the military has been part of the nation since its inception with the Nasserite revolution of 1952, the reliance on a patriarchal interpretation of

security has found its most recent militarized embodiment in the figure of President El Sisi. As Amina Mama highlighted (Mama 2014), militarized versions of security include institutionalized violence and surveillance according to patriarchal structures, which establish (or reinforce) women's positions as subordinates in domestic and public spaces. Any transformational event (including mass mobilization) can contradictorily reinforce, rather than subvert, gender ideologies and the status quo. Pulled between belief in the "women's revolution" and continuous gains and losses in a climate of instability, young women's rights activists certainly question how to challenge in the long term the relationship with a state whose authoritarian faces (such as Islamism, militarism and nationalism) keep shifting and mixing. With this thesis I am not offering another level of representation. Rather, I am aiming for another level of gendered relationality: not an answer to the "woman question", but a move to "gender possibilities", which – even when contradictory – have an imaginative, relational potential that terrifies the fantasy of the nation-state.

V. Thesis outline

The shifts in the making of the Egyptian nation-state and its subjectivities, and in the changes in post-revolutionary women's rights and feminist groups in Cairo, will be expanded on in the six chapters listed here. From the second chapter, a particular emphasis will be given to "affective nodes" – that is, the material, symbolic and emotional gendered technology which manages change and the status quo in public life in Egypt.

Chapter I sets up the context that sustains this thesis. I trace a conceptual map of the academic literature that informed my research on the gendered shifts in the formation of nationalist subjectivities and activists' politics. In particular, I look at the Egyptian postcolonial nation-state and its relationship with the women's movement in between 2012 and 2013 through the academic fields of gender and violence as well as gender and space.

Chapter II enters into the collective identity drawn by the personal stories of participation of young women activists. I look especially at the way their stories construct an antagonistic and gendered "we" in relation to structures of power and oppression. These are identified with institutional apparatuses representative of state feminism (such as the National Council) and with familiar hierarchies within feminism and the women's movement. The language of generations, mentorship and kinship – at times contradictory – is used to claim validation and underline the precariousness of feminist experiences and consciousness among the young. It denounces how the state especially has co-opted and transformed feminist activists relations, dividing the field. The anti-hierarchical sentiment, and the arguments about personal differences in coming to term with feminism, were especially produced (or confirmed) by the

revolution: for many, this enabled new relations and experimentations which gave a new value to feminism and popular politics.

Chapter III focuses on the military coup in the summer of 2013 in Cairo. The core of the chapter lies in questioning how control of the protests was regained under the logic of a neoliberal-militarist government. The analysis of the affects that supported the celebration of order will focus on masculine restoration through the optic of the remilitarization of post-revolutionary Egypt. It will also touch on the contradictory positions, at least in the initial phases of the coup, towards militarism.

Chapter IV looks at an emblematic political space in Cairo, Tahrir Square, through four different stories of participation: two stories of celebration, two stories of pain. I look at how the four experiences are emblematic of the gendered construction of Tahrir as a contentious space, where the en-gendering of the nation was contended between the nation-state and the political engagement of women's groups. The chapter explores how the ambiguous separation of the social ethics of gender expectations from the political gendering of participation was articulated and embodied by state institutions and protestors – as protectors, survivors, victims, punishers and abject bodies.

Chapter V paints a picture of street harassment in Cairo in relation to urban gentrification and the privatization of safety. As street harassment in daily life has given momentum to new women's groups and protests, it also shapes neoliberal discourses on urban divisions and class reproduction. Gender expectations in household reproduction and upward mobility were capitalized on by the nation-state to engender and spatialize new class exclusions by sexualizing deprived masculinities. They also had an impact on activists' campaigns, strategies and personal lives in tackling sexual harassment.

Chapter VI is a reflection on what constitutes feminist knowledge production in Cairo in a context where "truth" and "knowledge" are constantly manipulated by gendered fantasies of power. I put together different elements to trace what makes a feminist life worthwhile in Cairo: the attempts at creating forms of "informal" education for gender studies, offline and online; artistic practices and archives; memorials; and the fatigue of "feminism" amidst uncertainty, violence and backlash. The labour of gender activism questions the borders between what is inside and outside it, structuring and nurturing everyday life in a highly unstable political context.

My conclusion will look at the latest development of the Egyptian nation-state, with its increasing deadly repression and its distance from revolutionary ideals and practices, to revisit the whole thesis. It will ask what the future of the women's movement and feminist academic

research might be in a country affected by blatant militarist violence, a crumbling economy and strong geopolitical ties. I will underline the need for more intersectional analysis and for the transnational convergence of offline postcolonial feminist experiences and strategies, in academic and non-academic contexts alike.

CHAPTER I

WELCOME TO CAIRO: CONTEXTUALIZING FEMINISM AND THE GENDER POLITICS OF NATIONALIST BELONGING

I. Introduction: a conceptual map of the fieldwork

“Ahlan wa sahan” (welcome) sarcastically commented the retired Egyptian expat standing next to me inside the building of the Ministry of the Interior. We were waiting for our visas, having followed most of the procedure required: filling in papers; passing through entry scans conducted by a policewoman at the entrance to the ministry; leaving our identity documents with the clerk; going back and forth between various queues on different floors. The massive grey building looked hideous and crumbling next to the lively informal market overlooking Tahrir Square where food, toys, used Whole Foods bags, Egyptian flags and mint copies of the constitution were smartly displayed. While we tried to fight for personal space as female bodies in the crowded corridor, our gender, class, race and degrees of belonging to Egypt were analysed and classified: soon we would be called and directed to other queues, to which others – such as Syrians, Palestinians and Sudanese – had no access.

Singing Dalida’s¹⁰ *“Helwa ya baladi”* (“My beautiful country”) was the last task my Egyptian teacher assigned us when we reached the end of the course. Because of the mismatch between our basic level of fluency and the Arabic required for this nationalist song, I wondered whether the assignment had more to do with his involvement in the protests than with improving our grammar: he went out protesting every Friday and Tuesday after work. Since late 2012, protests had been demanding the departure of President Morsy, highlighting his unwelcome presence and the political-religious positions in play in Egypt. The identity politics of nation-making were part of our classroom.

“Mabrouk!” (congratulations) repeated two construction workers in Downtown Cairo, waving at all the passers-by on foot and in cars, while Egyptian flags and banners thanking Field Marshal El Sisi hung above their heads. The workers’ enthusiasm for Morsy’s incarceration came together with the nostalgic *“wahashtini ya Masr”* (I missed you, Egypt) and the pride in a newly found Egypt and Egyptian identity shared in the mass media. A few hundred metres away from Tahrir Square, Egypt in the El Sisi era was announced as a welcoming country.

These three brief moments introduce a glimpse of the debate about the form and content of belonging to Egypt that was central to public life during my fieldwork. In this chapter, the

¹⁰Dalida (1933–1987) was an internationally famous Italian-Egyptian singer. The song was first recorded in 1979.

shapes of this debate open up the context where I conducted my research and in which feminists and women's groups were moving. Belonging and exclusion were explicitly questioned and enacted, particularly in the heated climate following the fall of Mubarak, the electoral victory of the Muslim Brotherhood and the rise of El Sisi. What was to become of Egypt under the Islamists, or the military? Who was *out* and who was *in*? In the polarized struggle for the meaning of "Egyptian-ness" – in regard to morality, violence and urban spaces – women's behaviour, appearance and practices were put at the centre of the transition from a religiously conservative government to a military regime.

In this chapter I touch on some of the questions and literatures about the gendered politics of nationalist belonging in post-revolutionary Cairo – regarding ethics, laws, violence and space – invoked by everyday public debates during my fieldwork. The theoretical exploration of the context of my research foregrounds and sustains the material I analyse in the other chapters, and connects the context to a longer relationship between the politics of identity and feminism in Egypt. I attempt to reconnect and contextualize the feminist analyses and practices that will unfold in the next chapters through the gendered prism of what was politically produced and signified as "Egyptian" between 2012 and 2013 in Cairo.

II. Gendering political tensions: figures of exclusion and continuity under Morsy

"We won't become like Iran." During the heated months that preceded and followed the constitutional vote set up by President Morsy in October 2012, the spectre of a fall into the religious government of post-revolutionary Iran – or, less often, into the sectarian frictions of Iraq – expressed the fear of many of my middle-class acquaintances. Opponents of the recently elected government were convinced that January 2011 had been hijacked by the oppressive religious conservatism of the Islamist group Muslim Brotherhood¹¹ and their political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party.

¹¹ The Muslim Brotherhood (*Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimoun*) is a Sunni organization founded in 1928 in Egypt by Islamic scholar Hassan Al Banna, and currently spread transnationally. Its purpose is the re-establishment of shari'a law in the organization of political and everyday life, as a means to free Arab and Muslim countries from Western imperialism. The organization has been banned several times since its inception, in a climate of growing violence and tension with the Egyptian government. Although it successfully joined the elections in 2005, constituting the main political opposition to Mubarak, in 2011 it launched a new party, the Freedom and Justice Party (*Hizb Al-Horreya wa Al-'Adala*), for the parliamentary elections, and in 2012 its presidential candidate, Mohamed Morsy, was elected (Tadros 2012). Since 2013 thousands of Brotherhood members have been imprisoned, and hundreds have been sentenced to death, including the former president. The organization was declared a terrorist organization in 2013, and was banned from political participation in 2014. Its party was ordered to dissolve by the High Administrative Court in 2014. See: El-Sayed Gamel El-Din. "Egyptian court dissolves Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party." *Ahram Online*. 9th August

Concerns about what looked like a dark future fuelled a great number of rumours. The success of a new bar in upscale Zamalek or Maa'di – surprisingly thriving, despite heavy competition, corruption over the granting of licences, and the economic downturn – was frequently explained by a *bawab* next door in terms of Brotherhood favouritism, evidence of the secret economic interests and moral hypocrisy of the Islamist organization. Rumours and jokes were in this sense Benjaminian “unconscious precipitations of remembered forms in the present” (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 23). As happened with Islamists in Turkey, these rumours manifested the fear of a double discourse: that behind the Islamist government’s appearance of integrity lay multiple circuits of ethical and political behaviour which would inherit Mubarak’s political legacy while promising a different approach.

The feared political injury to the promises of the revolution started to be attached to the loss of pleasurable aspects of social and cultural life in Cairo, especially from the point of view of the urban liberal middle and upper class, although not exclusively so. Doubts about the Brotherhood’s political position on Egypt and its quest for justice and freedom were represented through metaphors – and in a way as negative prophecies – of conservative religious women’s attire, constructed as oppressive and regressive in today’s Egypt.



Mural: “Miss Egypt 2013.” Keizer. Cairo. 2013.¹²

2014. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/108081/Egypt/Politics-/Egyptian-court-dissolves-Brotherhood%E2%80%99s-Freedom-and.aspx>. Last access: 1st October 2015.

¹² Source: Photo courtesy of Keizer. www.facebook.com/KeizerStreetArt/photos. Last access: 29th August 2016.



Wheatpaste of the Statue of Liberty wearing a niqab in Saleh Salem Street. Cairo, June 2011. The image plays with a full niqab covering the woman/liberty invoked by protestors.¹³

The idea of the enforced radical Islamization of lifestyles, and of the beginning of restrictions on spaces and habits in Cairo, was discussed with genuine discomfort by secular and conservative alike. For the young feminist Alia, whom I saw in the autumn of 2013, several months after our previous meeting, the Brotherhood's shady, cynical control over the production and marketing of religious veils – and hence over the commercial profitability of religion refashioned as a lifestyle choice in neoliberal terms – was just as important now as their persistent presence at university and political competitiveness with the ultra-conservative Salafist group had been in the past.¹⁴ The negative reception of the Freedom and Justice Party was filtered through the decades of violence and marginality of the organization, which had operated in a regime of semi-informality and political repression, especially under Mubarak (Tadros 2012). At the same time, the perceived catastrophe of the Islamist government had resulted from a lack of serious political or economic reform.

Social and political tensions translated into the perceived breaking of multiple “native” cultural constructions of gender in contemporary Egypt, liberal and religious alike. Street art in Cairo reflected how conservative interpretations of gender roles, feminine and masculine embodiments, and the use of public spaces would take over Egypt in various ways. In the

¹³ Photo courtesy of JoAnna Pollonais, www.joannapollonais.com. Last access: 3rd May 2017.

¹⁴ In Egypt Salafis are not united under a single organization: the various groups, however, share an ultra-conservative Islamist ideology focused on a strict application of shari'a law, more radical than that of the Brotherhood. In 2011 the group Salafist Call founded the Al-Nour Party, which ran for parliamentary elections and became part of the government under Morsy. Although initially allied with it as part of the Islamic bloc, the Salafist party increasingly distanced itself from the Morsy government, finally supporting the ousting of the president (El-Dine 2014; Tavana 2013).

media, several news pieces focused on the debate and protests about lifting the legal prohibition against beards among male conscripts and security members (Mahfouz 2014), and on how gender-segregated bars and no-alcohol resorts would soon spread in Cairo and on the Egyptian coast.¹⁵

However, while the politics of the Brotherhood was represented in continuity with the recent history of masculine leaders,¹⁶ and its followers were dehumanized as flocks of “sheep”, the social and cultural tension engendered by the government was more powerfully represented by “backward” and “unfamiliar femininities”. Ironically mingling imperialism and Islamist revival with the freedom fought for in January 2011, the representation of conservative religious femininities, like the rumours, precipitated forms imbued with fear. Figures of women dressed in conservative attire gestured towards a future social discontinuity with the post-revolutionary present, and ultimately towards social loss.

Fears of losing freedom and of forgetting any moderate, and more authentic, nationalist identity thus crystallized in public into an essentialized and divisive Muslim female figure, characterized by radical *haya'* (sexual modesty). Extremism was not constructed out of a simple fracture between secular (*'almaniyy*) habits or liberal (*libiraliyy*) beliefs and Muslim sensitivities. As a respected and pious retired engineer and his family told me when joining the protests against Morsy in Tahrir Square in winter 2012: “This is not the Islam we believe in; this is why we came to the square.” The separation between extremism and Egyptian sensibilities was constructed through different circuits of morality and religious behaviour, suggesting a political illegitimacy. The well-founded anxiety about falling into a hypocritical “moral fascism” constructed the Brotherhood’s morality as an invasion of the whole society. It was culturalized through images that symbolically and materially used a colonial image of Muslim women’s oppression (Yaqin 2011; Abu-Lughod 2013), constructed as an “out-of-place” feminine body in Cairo.

However, as a young activist, Hala, told me in the summer of 2013: “Most of us have a relative in the Brotherhood, or Salafi, or anyway very conservative.” The expected Islamic imposition essentialized a figure of “extraneity” through figures that were actually familiar to many. In Egypt as elsewhere, veiling practices are not necessarily a sign of consistency within normative religious prescriptions (Schielke and Debevec 2012; Schielke 2015). The rise of Islamism, at the same time, was not indifferent to the neoliberal construction of religion as an individual,

¹⁵ See for instance: “Egypt’s first no-alcohol resort opens in Hurghada.” *Ahram Online*. 28th April 2013. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/70292/Business/Economy/Egyptys-first-noalcohol-resort-opens-in-Hurghada--.aspx>. Last access: 15th September 2015.

¹⁶ See Chapter III.

private choice of the subject.¹⁷ Were other liberal “modern Egyptian women” surfacing, then, through negative prophecies of radical Islamization (as in pre-AKP Istanbul (Navaro-Yashin 2002)) – a form of return of repressed modernities? Or was a new arrangement of gender, modernity and nationalism in play that leveraged existing political fears to implicitly suggest different “attire” for Egypt and its femininities?

As described in the central chapters of my thesis, feminine lifestyles and nationalist practices in Egypt are subject to continuous social and cultural resignifications which are historically contentious, various and mutable. Gender, along with other axes of oppression, is in a living relationship with societal, cultural and political changes that intersect with people’s desires, complex beliefs and mixed pursuits of moral goodness, fun, pleasure and pain. The history of gender in Egypt shows that this was not the first time that women, morality and modernity had been deployed to engender particular nationalist configurations of belonging and exclusion.

III. Between morality and politics: reworking gender and modernity in Egypt

In this essentialization of the cultural politics of the body in Egypt, and in the misrecognition of the cultural and historical exchanges in which a plurality of embodiments were emerging in Cairo, there was a form of historical continuity. As far back as the early 1900s, various symbolic and material dimensions of gender had gained momentum during the protests that led to the birth of the Egyptian state. In the wake of subaltern struggles for national independence in different colonial regions of the world during the first half of the 20th century, the “modern woman” potently identified the process of building a “modern nation”, indissolubly linking women’s emancipation to nationalism (Jayawardena 1986). The discourse of women’s liberation was linked with anti-colonial and nationalist struggles, as famously envisioned by nationalist modernist Qasim Amin (Ahmed 1992; Shakry 1998). In Egypt, the modern woman was educated and unveiled, like feminist Huda Sha’rawi. For Leila Ahmed (1992), however, the unveiling championed by Qasim Amin, the secular intellectual and “liberator of women”, was not motivated by decolonizing impulses, but rather by a deep dependence on colonial rhetoric and a desire to shape upper-class women in particular through Victorian morality and domesticity.

The influence of European institutions and colonialism over the modernization project in Middle Eastern societies was particularly evident in the promotion of the bourgeois family

¹⁷ Research on Muslim women's veiling practices - interpreted as negotiations with social pressure, colonialism, the job market, and class aspirations (McLeod 1991; Talhami 1996; El Guindi 1999; Abaza 2007) - highlights the non-linearity of religious practices and identities.

(Abu-Lughod 1998; Massad 2007) and the cult of motherhood to preserve the nation (Shakry 1998). Modernization was mediated through local understandings of nationalism shared by religious and secular discourses alike. In the “modern couple”, the woman would match the “modern man” in an apparently more egalitarian contract (for instance, by accepting a minimal dowry). Doria Shafik’s short-lived marriage, covered by important Egyptian publications and favoured by Huda Sha’rawi, set a visible example of modernity (Nelson 1996). Women’s “modern” public role – at work, in education – attempted to create not only a moral but also an aesthetic mother-model for subsequent generations of Egyptian nationalist citizens (Ahmed 1992; Shakry 1998; Pollard 2005; Baron 2007). In order to implement the project of “modernizing” Egypt, gender was essential to mobilize the notion of a modern, cultivated domesticity and motherhood; to build the symbol of the nation as a particular version of woman; and to shape the iconography of women politicians and activists (Badran 1996; Abu-Lughod 1998; Hatem 2000; Moghadam 2003).

From the second half of the century, the Egyptian “modern woman” stopped being celebrated as a visible part of the construction of the nation-state in Egypt. As elsewhere, “inauthentic” distortions and manipulations of Western colonial powers against the nation-state were juxtaposed with the bodies and public positions of women (Moghadam 1994, 2003: 95–96; Yuval-Davis 1997), who were required to perform their functions in other, more “authentic” ways. The decolonization process, however, was not as straightforward as had been envisaged, since colonialism had never existed as a unilateral force affecting the whole of society from the outside (Hall 1996). With the death of Nasser, the slow dismantling of the socialist order gave way to the liberalization of the Egyptian market, which – under Anwar Sadat and later Hosni Mubarak – dramatically restructured Egypt for over 25 years. During the same time frame, state feminism (Hatem 1992, 1994a, 1994b) – the co-optation of women in support of the patriarch-state – was followed by popular disillusionment with and open dismissal of feminism and women’s initiatives. New forms of state co-optation emerged with Mubarak under the guise of the National Council for Women (2000) and the NGO-ization process (Jad 2006).

The competitive agendas for women engendered by the interplay of religious, economic and institutional forces (Badran 1991; Karmi 1996; Al-Azhary Sonbol 2005; Moghissi et al. 2005) were instrumental in the construction of Egyptian womanhood and feminism as locally appreciated or rejected. This interplay articulated different forms of patriarchal oppression and erasures of women’s rights, justified by nationalist and state interests as well as ethical dimensions (Zuhur 1992; Hatem 2010; Moghadam 2007; Mariscotti 2008). Such patterns of formations of historical action and political subjectivities are still being faced by the contemporary secular Egyptian women’s movement (Al-Ali 2000; Alessa 2010; Lewis 2012) and

in the particularities of women's experiences of struggle against authoritarianism and violence in Cairo during the upheavals (Abu-Lughod and El Mahdi 2011; Hatem 2011, 201; Al-Ali 2012; Kandiyoti 2011, 2012, 2013; Pratt 2015; Tadros 2016). The questioning of gender arrangements during the 18 days of protests, which spread from Tahrir all over the country in the subsequent years, revealed a vernacular "civil society feminist activism" (Kamal 2015: 155) amid a severe backlash and violence. While the fear of Islamist authoritarianism was constructed through conservative feminine bodies, the state's fear of decay was encapsulated in representations of uncontrolled female bodies at protests. The stigmatized "lack of morality" made female protesters extraneous to Egypt: in the words of an anonymous member of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), the protesters were "not like your daughter or mine".¹⁸ Caught between these two sides, women had no possibility to belong to Egypt fully.

IV. Legalizing exclusion: feminists and the 2012 constitution

The gendered debate on nationalist belonging further deepened feminist fears with the introduction of the new constitution in autumn 2012. Under the slogan "*La lil-dostour*" ("No to the constitution"), protests concerning the constitutional committees and draft content spread rapidly and systematically, and new rumours about irregularities in the referendum mechanism accompanied the process leading to the ratification of the constitution in December 2012. What worried the protesters was not only what specific articles said – such as the attempt to extend presidential powers even further – but also what the articles did not say about women's rights. Several feminists and women's organizations, together with prominent human-rights organizations, lamented that the new constitution greatly invisibilized women's rights and their place in Egyptian society.

Since the constitution was the object of revolutionary hopes for social justice and the equal status of women and minorities, many of the feminist organizational efforts and political gestures after January 2011 focused on redefining the gendered terms of belonging in Egypt through collaborative work on the new constitution (Kamal 2015). The Women and Constitution Working Group (WCWG) was set up and hosted in May 2011 by the Women and Memory Forum (WMF) (Kamal 2015: 150–151) during SCAF's temporary presidency. A review of constitutional reform had in fact been founded in February 2011 by the military, with a

¹⁸ Shahira Amin. "Egyptian general admits 'virginity tests' conducted on protesters." *CNN*. 17th May 2011. <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/05/30/egypt.virginity.tests/index.html>. Last access: 20th September 2014. For an in-depth discussion of women protesters, see Chapter IV.

men-only committee.¹⁹ The core WCWG group brought together members of various feminist organizations, such as WMF and Nazra, plus women political scientists and activists, who worked in collaboration with the Let's Write Our Constitution group and the Popular Committee for Constitutional Writing.²⁰ They all belonged to the Coalition of Egyptian Feminist Organizations, which comprised 17 organizations, many of which had already been part of a previous coalition (Tadros 2016: 186).

This work became crucial, as the constitution drafted in 2012 did not take into account any of the demands of the revolution.²¹ It did not specify gender-based violence or discrimination (Article 33), but merely mentioned in its preamble freedom from discrimination for all citizens, regardless of gender.²² Furthermore, it naturalized the idea of women's duties (Article 10) as reproductive labour. The WCWG tried to capitalize on the lively debates about rights during the post-revolutionary period to propose new articles "on issues of equality and non-discrimination, political participation, labor, childhood, education, personal freedoms and health care".²³

The Brotherhood further fuelled the disappointment in the constitution, transforming it into an anti-imperialist "war" against UN Women's (El Sadda 2013) championing of decadent imperialist morality. The 57th Commission on the Status of Women, held at UN headquarters in March 2013, which reached agreed conclusions,²⁴ was attacked midway through its work

¹⁹ Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights (ECWR) Statement. "Egypt: women excluded from the constitutional committee." *Pambazuka*. 21st February 2011. <http://www.pambazuka.org/gender-minorities/egypt-women-excluded-constitutional-committee>. Last access: 20th January 2014. While lamenting that the committee had no female representatives, the statement supports the military-led initiative and government. Unlike other feminist and women's initiatives who opposed the government, the ECWR always supported the army during the post-revolutionary period.

²⁰ "Women & Constitution Working Group Document." *Women and Memory Forum*. <http://www.wmf.org/eg/en/women-constitution-working-group-document>. (No date, but presumably 26th April 2012, as the statement was cross-posted on Nazra's website). Last access: 20th January 2014.

²¹ "Egypt's new constitution limits fundamental freedoms and ignores the rights of women." *Amnesty International*. 30th November 2012. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2012/11/egypt-s-new-constitution-limits-fundamental-freedoms-and-ignores-rights-women>. Last access: 29th August 2015.

²² Nariman Youssef. "Egypt's draft constitution translated." *Egypt Independent*. 2nd December 2012. <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/egypt-s-draft-constitution-translated>. Last access: 29th August 2015.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ See: "CSW agreed conclusions 2013." *United Nations*. 18th March 2013. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw57/CSW57_agreed_conclusions_advance_undited_version_18_March_2013.pdf. Last access: 29th August 2015.

(Tolmay 2013) by an official declaration of the Muslim Brotherhood.²⁵ The statement objected that the conclusions on the ending of violence against women “would lead to complete disintegration of society, and would certainly be the final step in the intellectual and cultural invasion of Muslim countries, eliminating the moral specificity that helps preserve cohesion of Islamic societies”.²⁶ In the attempt to prevent “decadence” from attacking Egypt, the Brotherhood rejected the conclusions “that contradict established principles of Islam, undermine Islamic ethics and destroy the family, the basic building block of society, according to the Egyptian Constitution”.²⁷ The application of the UN Women proposals would encourage women’s sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, equality in marriage (such as equal reproductive labour, equal divorce rights, and the passage from guardianship to partnership) and the right to denounce spousal violence.²⁸

On the basis of an essentialized, culturalist view of Egyptian society as a restricted version of Islamist society (El Sadda 2013), the Brotherhood defended the constitution from the government’s critics and external institutions by underlining that women’s position in Egypt was “naturally”, culturally and legally subordinate (see also Tadros 2012). In various protests, though, several Egyptian women – Muslim and Christian, practising and secular – rejected this view of womanhood which denied the existence of their difference – for instance, by cutting their hair, a symbol of femininity. By refusing to vindicate an oppressive power, they challenged the subordinating conditions of their belonging to Egypt through the very gendered acts and sentiments that had been excluded by the political views of the government.

V. Constitutional concealments and the precarization of women

The paramount legal concern for the Islamist government until the ousting of Morsy was the feminization of reproductive labour. The feminine figure of Egyptian domesticity continued to agitate women protesters on all political and religious sides in large numbers. Figures close to or within the government harshly criticized Egyptian women – in the square²⁹ and in rural

²⁵ “Muslim Brotherhood statement denouncing UN Women declaration for violating sharia principles.” *Ikhwan Web*. 14th March 2013. <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=30731>. Last access: 29th August 2015.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ A number of organizations and individuals represented at the Arab Caucus deplored the statement and called upon the governments of Egypt and other countries that refused to consider the conclusions to subscribe to them. See: “UN: a call from the Arab Caucus at the 57th Commission on the Status of Women”. *Women Living Under Muslim Laws*. 13th March 2013. <http://www.wluml.org/media/un-call-arab-caucus-57th-commission-status-women>. Last access: 15th March 2015.

²⁹ “Raping women in Tahrir NOT ‘red line’: Egyptian preacher Abu Islam.” *Al Arabiya*. 7th February 2013. <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2013/02/07/264982.html>. Last access: 15th

areas³⁰ – by emphasising that local Egyptian womanhood was to be understood in a position of patriarchal protection, top-down masculine guidance and domestic space.³¹ The revolution and everyday life, however, had instead demonstrated the great fluidity of women’s organizational forms, strategies and labour in non-domestic spaces. If anything characterized the condition and political consciousness of the majority of Egyptians, it was the continuity of precariousness between domestic and non-domestic labour.

The politicization of urban, low-income, unemployed and informally employed male and female workers – not represented by any labour movements, and stigmatized by the official parties – was in fact particularly important during the January 2011 protests (see Ryzova 2013; cf. Kandil 2011), where they stood side by side with already-engaged middle-class protesters. This participation of precarious members of Egyptian society contrasted with the depoliticization of upper-class Egyptian intellectuals (Duboc 2013), and to some extent also with the traditional history of revolutionary turmoil. Labour movements have historically been one the largest engines of social upheaval in Egypt (Bier 2011), and had been organizing mass protests since 2004, leading to the foundation of the 6th April Movement in 2007³² (Beinin and el-Hamalawy 2007; Abdalla 2012). Although 6th April helped to pave the way for January 2011, the epicentre of the revolution was the urban context of Tahrir Square in Cairo, on Police Day 2011.

The relevance of precariousness to women’s condition and the political insistence on their domestic vocation was not random. The articulation of gender roles in the nationalist projects of modernity from Nasser onwards (Hatem 1994b, 2010) saw the Egyptian state actively deploying or misappropriating feminist policies and language to mobilize women at home and at work. Since the 1970s, the retreat of state-led forms of social intervention (education, health and state jobs) favoured market-led structural adjustments, investments in the profitable service sector only, and an enormous external debt compared with Nasser (Amin

March 2015. Radical preacher Abu Islam called the women assaulted “she-devils” and stated that they were intentionally going to the square to be raped.

³⁰ “‘Boob Job’: Egypt’s PM says ‘unclean breasts’ can cause diarrhoea.” *Al Arabiya*. 5th February 2013. <https://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2013/02/05/264586.html>. Last access: 15th March 2015.

³¹ Rana Muhammad Taha. “Shura Council members blame women for harassment.” *Daily News Egypt*. 11th February 2013. <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/02/11/shura-council-members-blame-women-for-harassment>. Last access: 15th March 2015.

³² Other movements contributed at the same time to the formation of 6th April, such Kefaya (Enough) and the Egypt Movement for Change (Shorbagy 2007; al-Sayyid 2009). In 2005, against Mubarak’s renewed presidency and the apparent grooming of his son Gamal for succession, Kefaya emerged as the main force in street politics, building on anti-imperialist and anti-colonial feelings expressed in previous years (such as during the Second Intifada in 2000, and the Iraqi war and occupation in 2003).

2011). In the last decade, new jobs in the public sector (the traditional occupation for women graduates, according to Law 14 of 1964: Al Mahdi 2002) were curtailed: fiscal unsustainability after the oil crisis in the 1980s and 1990s provoked their slow stagnation (Assaad 2014).

As a consequence, the feminization of certain employment sectors (such as education and the civil service) grew, while other strategic sectors became less feminized. The resulting reduction of salaries and job opportunities for women affected both the private and public sectors³³ (Assaad 2002; Assaad and Krafft 2015: 40). The inability to form a new family and escape from social pressure grew in relevance (Singerman 2007), together with the increasing unemployment and descent into informal employment for both men and women (Attia 2009; Wahba 2009; Harati 2013). As available jobs for men – in the service sector – decreased, women and men had to cope differently with the lack of welfare, particularly among the young (Assaad and Barsoum 2009; Amin 2011; Barsoum et al. 2014).

The precarization of feminine labour in Cairo was visible everywhere during my fieldwork: at the anti-constitution protests, where a chat with a middle-aged tissue seller revealed that she had chosen to come to Tahrir in the hope of selling more and seeing the square full again; in the desperate fights in the queues for subsidized bread and petrol, and the complaints about day-long electricity cuts and the lack of basic staples; in the casual encounters with young women who shook their heads over their limited opportunities and pressing responsibilities, before and after the revolution alike. Yet the constitution denied the actual precariousness of women's work and the large number of women breadwinners and female-head households in Egypt – which according to official data account for almost a fifth of all households in Egypt,³⁴ but which unofficially stand at well over 30 per cent according to Mona Ezzat from the feminist group New Woman Foundation.³⁵

It should be noted that the constitutional link between women and domesticity, strongly supported by the Brotherhood, was not novel (McLarney 2016). As in the 1971 constitution,

³³ This is an anomaly compared with other countries in the MENA region, such as Morocco, where the feminization of labour as a whole is on the rise, despite similar structural conditions (Assaad 2002).

³⁴ "Almost a fifth of Egyptian households are headed by women: CAPMAS." *Ahram Online*. 14th May 2014. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/101284/Business/Economy/Almost-a-fifth-of-Egyptian-households-are-headed-b.aspx>. Last access: 20th January 2016. In October 2013, the activist group Ana Hunna (I Am Here) organized a Twitter campaign to inform and support women breadwinners in Egypt.

³⁵ Arwa Gaballa. "Female breadwinners struggle as Egypt's economy deteriorates." *Aswat Masriya*. 12th November 2013. <http://www.aswatmasriya.com/en/news/details/15513>. Last access: 20th January 2016.

and in the future 2014 constitution,³⁶ in the 2012 version the state role is said to be to support women's work in agreement (*tawfiq*) between non-domestic work and their "domestic duties", in accordance with the laws of Islamic shari'a. McLarney (2016) argues that the language of agreement showed that the Brotherhood's intention was to reconcile the language of previous constitutions with the liberal discourse on human rights. It relegated religious control to the private sphere, as had been the case since the 1956 constitution under Nasser, and it did so in a way that sowed the seeds for a more equal constitution in 2014.

Yet, as shown by the declaration against UN Women's agreed conclusions on violence against women, and by the escalating violence against protesters, the constitution did not emerge in a void. Despite the increased number of labour protests (Beinin 2013), the government under Morsy continued to fuel the informalization and distortion of the labour market in Egypt (Assaad 2002, 2014), thus actively supporting gender and class tensions in the "public sphere" where – unlike at home – political and non-denominational equality was supposed to be promoted. In the battle over the cultural understanding of what was "alien" to Egypt, the Islamist government resurrected a "local culture" of religious morality to culturalize and naturalize domesticity, and to legally restrict or invisibilize actual Egyptian women's conditions and oppression.

In 2014 a new constitution, elaborated by a 50-member committee in which a small but active number of feminists had participated, was approved by popular vote. Despite a number of reservations, rejections and further recommendations,³⁷ various feminists were positive that women's requests had been finally listened to (El Sadda 2015; Kamal 2015). In the search for a gendered space of equal national belonging, the articles on sexual violence and sexual harassment were considered a major advance.³⁸ The centrality of violence in fact reconnected the "public" and "private" dimensions of the landscape of gender, modernity, culture and colonialism that had unfolded in the urban spaces of Cairo. Gender-based violence reopened the question of the politics of Egyptian identity in ways that would backfire on the Islamist government. As an inescapable experience for women activists and protesters during 2012 and 2013, it was also where their subjectivity was formed, in painful ways, and where their multiple identities could be affirmed.

³⁶ However, the historical contexts in which these constitutions were ratified were quite different, let alone the question of the force of the law in the Egyptian state. See the brief descriptions of the state of exception in Chapter III and impunity in Chapter V.

³⁷ On this dilemma see Chapter II.

³⁸ See Chapter V.

VI. Repressing women and remaking the regime

The uncertainty of violence was an inescapable horizon of life in Cairo during my fieldwork³⁹ and in the years afterwards for feminist activists. In the deepening of the structural issues in the job market and the gendered consequences all over Egypt of precarization, which particularly penalizes female-headed households (AlAzzawi 2015), the symbolic and legal “othering” of women’s demands was condensed into physical aggression against the late Shahenda Maklad⁴⁰. Maklad, a long-standing feminist and labour activist for farmers’ rights, had her mouth covered by a close affiliate of Morsy at a protest she joined in December 2012⁴¹. Amid the persistent lack of security reform (Sayigh 2015) and the high number of violent occurrences,⁴² the government’s lack of interest in gender-based violence coincided

³⁹ Violence determines accessibility to fields (Scheper-Hughes 2007) and can threaten the survival of the researcher in the most extreme cases (Nordstrom and Robben 1995), as tragically happened with Cambridge PhD Student Giulio Regeni in early 2016.

⁴⁰ Shahenda Maklad (1938–2016) was an activist for workers’ rights. Active since her youth, she became a prominent peasants’ activist after the political assassination of her husband in rural Egypt in 1966. She was interviewed in the documentaries *Four Women of Egypt* (Canada 1997) and *In the Shadow of a Man* (Egypt/UK 2013).

⁴¹ A 2012 political cartoon - “The voice of Egyptian women.”, by Doaa Eladl - depicted the beard of a conservative man covering the mouth of a woman to prevent her from speaking. It was inspired by a comment by Rona Elgebaly on the lack of women’s rights in the new constitution proposed by the Muslim Brotherhood. It became a reality, however, for Shahenda Maklad, for protestor Mervat Moussa, a member of the Popular Current party, and for socialist activist Ola Shahba, among many others. See also: “Activist slapped outside Brotherhood office speaks out.” *Egypt Independent*. 18th March 2013. <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/activist-slapped-outside-brotherhood-office-speaks-out>. Last access: 20th January 2016. A similar event happened later, in November 2013, when an elderly woman awaiting the trial of Morsy in front of the court was harassed and slapped in the face by a supporter of Raba’a. The aggression further polarized the debate about the extraneity to Egypt of the Brotherhood and their use of violence against women.

⁴² For instance, religious killings of Egyptian Christians (“Egypt: mass attacks on churches.” *HRW*. 21st August 2013. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/08/21/egypt-mass-attacks-churches>) and Shia (“Egypt: lynching of Shia follows months of hate speech.” *HRW*. 27th June 2013. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/27/egypt-lynching-shia-follows-months-hate-speech>); repressions of strikes all over Egypt (Beinin 2012); the curfew and killings of football fans following the death sentence regarding the police-provoked 2011 stadium riots in Port Said (Reza Sayah and Amir Ahmed. “Egypt’s Morsy declares curfew in 3 cities, vows ‘justice’ for those behind violence.” *CNN*. 27th January 2013. <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/01/27/world/africa/egypt-unrest/>); the appointment of a member of the Islamist group Gamaa Islamiya, responsible for a deadly attack against tourists in Luxor in 1997, to the governorship of Luxor (Patrick Kingsley. “Egypt’s Mohamed Morsi appoints hardline Islamist to govern Luxor.” *The Guardian*. 17th June 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/17/morsi-appoints-islamist-governor-luxor>). Last access: 29th August 2015.

with severe sexual attacks on (especially) women protesters, underlining the hypocrisy of the institutions⁴³ (FIDH et al. 2014).

As I will explore in greater depth in the following chapters, violence was used to control and regulate the growth of Egypt throughout colonialism since the Ottoman era (Fahmy 1997). Policing mechanisms and the role of the army in Egypt highlight historically how punishment and disciplinary bodies have become constitutive components of the formation and maintenance of the modern nation-state of Egypt. How did violence collide with the fantasy of postcolonial Egypt as a nation-state? Fanon (1963) and Mbembe (2003) draw on a concept of deadly violence, which vertically descends from the colonial state to its colonial bodies – but that can be turned back against the state by liberation movements if necessary, a position defended by some Egyptian activists (see also Rizk 2013).

In other terms, and without underestimating the disciplinary and pedagogical mechanisms of violence (Foucault 1977), violent acts can be not only destructive but also socially productive. The violent years following the ousting of Mubarak, throughout Morsy and the rise of El Sisi, constituted a series of liminal, transitional stages (Turner 1974) at a societal and individual level which shaped subjects, spaces and communities in non-reversible ways. From violent acts, articulations of gender critique can emerge (Abu-Lughod 1986), and with them also specific forms of political consciousness and activist practices (Aretxaga 1997). In her ethnography of the republican women's movement in Northern Ireland, Aretxaga (1997) underlined how Catholic Irish women confronted the climate of intense violence that targeted them with bodily practices of protest that resignified the gendered and sexual specificity of their pain. Similarly, Egyptian women activists and protestors were not only subjected to particular scrutiny and forms of sexualized discipline. They were also subjects of their own bodily and affective strategies, in the formation of emergency groups for protestors; in publicly sharing personal stories of sexual assault in the streets and at protests; and in taking legal action against virginity tests and pursuing the recognition of them as violence.⁴⁴ During the post-2011 years of repressive political violence – as in “any observable interaction in the course of which persons and objects are seized or physically damaged in spite of resistance” (Tilly 1978: 176) – feminist subjectivities found grounds for collaborations and consciousness. In the engineering of regime-making, violence was an unavoidably gendered domain (Enloe 1990, 1993, 2000; Yuval-Davis 1997).

⁴³ Political violence and sexual harassment grew with a horrific intensity that I will describe in Chapters IV and V.

⁴⁴ All these aspects will be elaborated in the next chapters. In Chapter IV in particular I give more information about pain, violence and feminist activism.

At the same time, state violence was self-productive. It became a foundational structure of authoritarian regime-making and remilitarization after January 2011 (Teti 2013; Stacher 2013a, 2013b, 2015). Indeed, Stacher notes that the transition from Morsy to El Sisi “oversaw the greatest expansion of state violence against Egyptians in contemporary history” (Stacher 2015: 267).

Contesting women’s bodies and spaces in order to resignify the boundaries of what was “Egyptian”, the use and language of violence repositioned Morsy and the Brotherhood as an internal threat to Egypt. The indifference and complacency towards (especially) gender-based violence, of which the Brotherhood was accused, inscribed the organization under the rubric of “terrorism” in the summer of 2013. The ban on them was legally ratified in December 2013.⁴⁵ The entire body of Egyptian society was in physical danger, just as women were: new laws were to be enforced in the fight against terrorism.⁴⁶ Yet in the year and a half of transitional SCAF rule that preceded Morsy, from February 2011 to June 2012, political violence harmed and killed thousands of Egyptians, from administering of virginity tests⁴⁷ to running over protesters with tanks.⁴⁸ But during the crackdown on Morsy supporters in summer 2013, the blood in the streets recalled nationalist ties as perhaps nothing else had done before, while at the same time evoking a language of societal purity (Schielke 2014) apparently free of any of the ambiguities and contradictions that form nationalist identities. The discursive device of the “enemy”, which Morsy had used to defend the violent repression of religious minorities and dissident groups (such as the Black Bloc,⁴⁹ women protesters (Kandiyoti 2013), the media⁵⁰ and the workers’ movement⁵¹), backfired. The “otherness” of the Muslim Brotherhood to the

⁴⁵ See: “Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood declared ‘terrorist group’.” *BBC*. 25th December 2013. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25515932>. Last access: 20th January 2016.

⁴⁶ Law 94 was enacted in August 2015. In this law, terrorist acts are defined in opaque terms. The law gives the president a power similar to those conceded by the state of emergency; allows the prosecution of journalists who give alternative versions of terrorism rather than official statements; and creates special courts to try terrorists. See: “Egypt’s President to sign draconian counterterrorism law today”. *Amnesty International*. 13th August 2015. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2015/08/egypt-s-president-to-sign-draconian-counterterrorism-law-today>. Last access: 20th January 2016.

⁴⁷ See Chapter IV.

⁴⁸ Sarah Carr. “Why is Maspero different?” *Mada Masr*. 10th October 2013. <http://www.madamasr.com/sections/politics/why-maspero-different>. Last access: 15th September 2015.

⁴⁹ Luiz Sanchez. “Prosecutor general demands Black Bloc arrests.” *Daily News Egypt*. 29th January 2013. <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/01/29/prosecutor-general-demands-black-bloc-arrests>. Last access: 1st September 2016.

⁵⁰ “Concerns over media freedoms in Morsy’s Egypt.” *Africa Review*. 23rd January 2013. <http://www.africareview.com/news/Concerns-over-media-freedoms-in-Morsy-Egypt/979180-1673004-l3cwuez/index.html>. Last access: 1st September 2016.

⁵¹ Zenobia Azeem. “Egyptian youth movement continues revolution.” *Al-Monitor*. 29th April 2013. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/04/egypt-youth-movements-opposition-april-6.html>. Last access: 1st September 2016.

political body of Egypt functionally supported military intervention against all forms of dissent, in order to serve the “deep state” (Stacher 2015) and provide a distraction from social and economic pressure.

The targeting of female bodies became essential to state violence in yet another way. The constant injection of state violence (and non-state violence) addressed the continuity of patriarchy and precariousness in sustaining constant societal conflict, outside any dichotomy of war and peace (Moser and Clark 2001; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004; Ahäll and Sheperd 2012). While women’s multiple positions in Egypt were framed through essentialized versions of locally “authentic” femininity – as either in need of control or fearing control – their bodies were also deliberately used to separate the violence of Islamist terrorists from the “proper” violence of state policing and patriarchal control. The fulfilment of the prophecies of Islamist feminine oppression and violence constituted an Islamist “other” through a language of Egyptian nationalist identity, spoken as a gendered language of militarized protection.

VII. Militarism and the continuum of violence

If political violence, heavy gender bias and attacks on minorities (Tadros 2013a, 2013b) had marked the governance of Morsy, the new regime did not differ radically. The “weeks of killings” (EIPR 2014) in 2013 killed hundreds of Egyptians in Raba’a’s sole pro-Morsy camp. Female Morsy supporters were depicted in the media as sacrificed human shields (Hassan 2015: 190) or as imitators of Ultras’ embodiments and affects in a blend of “modest” and “bold” political participation. In contrast, militarized masculinities and femininities siding with the army⁵² justified the necessity of an authoritarian regime more violent than the 1952 rule of the Free Officers (Stacher 2015). The fracture between terrorists and Egyptians after July 2013 was remarkably gendered, and expressed in militarist terms.

The tensions between power and gender, expressed through violence, reveal multiple, entrenched ways in which in the MENA region “violence is a weapon for subordinating women... there is a link between militarism and patriarchal oppression” (Ennaji and Sadiqi 2011: 8). Gender-based violence is a privileged site of power claims in contexts of militarization. In the MENA region, several in-depth analyses concern the struggles of Palestinian women’s movements and lives in resistance against Israeli military occupation and patriarchy (Sharoni 1995; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009; Kassem 2011), revealing how they have sought to combine political liberation with social liberation. In the context of Iraq, Al-Ali and Pratt (2010) showed the erosion of women’s rights and the devaluation of women’s contribution and role due to the invasion and occupation of imperial forces that were

⁵² I will describe these gender dynamics in Chapter III.

discursively constructed as liberators. Enloe (2010) collected several case studies of women – both Iraqi and American – who lived in Iraq, to explore the gendered costs of warfare and occupation.

In the various ways militarism exploits and relies on asymmetrical gender hierarchies, which are constantly negotiated by feminists and activists, political violence assumes multiple meanings. In particular, the reconfiguration of gender roles regards everyday life as much as security actors and the state. The “otherness” which marks violent gender relations and power claims reflects “orientalist concepts of superiority, paternalism, suspicion and condescension” (De Matos and Ward 2012: 6; see also McClintock 1995; Stoler 1995). Forms of patriarchal neocolonialism permeate occupation as much as they permeate, as in Egypt, everyday societal conflicts engendered by militarized neoliberalism.

The connection between militarism and sexual harassment (Chinkin 2003: 657) stands next to documented abuses by security apparatuses and a general and transversal impunity of violent acts. Translating this to neocolonial Egypt, this supposes that a certain level of social conflict and gendered social oppression is constantly produced – or even simply tolerated – by the government and institutional power, as well as by social groups and individuals.

The troubling state violence that emerged in Egypt after 2011 has shaped several feminist and women-led initiatives, texts and reports that look for links between, and legal recognition of, different forms of gender-based violence. Several reports (El Deeb 2013; El-Nadeem 2013; HRW 2013; FIDH et al. 2014; Amnesty International 2015; Marroushi 2015) and pieces of research (Amir 2013; Tadros 2013b; McRobie 2014) look at the specificities of violence against female and male protesters as well as against human rights defenders. The multiplicity of gender-based violence (sexual harassment, domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, LGBTQI violence⁵³) maintains its complexity and continuity for all Egyptian feminist groups and activists.⁵⁴

The paucity of data available, particularly on domestic violence, is at odds with the widespread experience of gender-based violence. As of today, there is no law against domestic violence. The latest report on domestic violence, published in 2006 (El-Zanaty and Way 2006), showed that half of married women in Egypt (aged 15–49) had experienced forms of physical violence,

⁵³ Under Law 10 of 1961, “debauchery” (*fugur*) charges – to do with perceived gender identity and sexual orientation – targeted over 90 Egyptians between 2013 and 2014. In 2015 the acquittal of 26 men arrested in a bathhouse was followed by great popular attention and unprecedented support for the right to privacy. See: Dalia Abdel Hameed. “Inquisitorial authority.” *EIPR*. May 2016. <http://eipr.org/en/blog/dalia-abd-el-hameed/2016/05/inquisitorial-authority>. Last access: 10th September 2016.

⁵⁴ See Chapter V for a more detailed description.

including sexual violence. A 2008 Ministry of Health report about female genital mutilation (FGM, or *khitan* circumcision) stated that although since 2005 the number of mutilations had decreased, more than half of Egyptian teenagers were expected to undergo the practice in future, adding to the 92 per cent of married women (aged 15–49) who had already undergone the practice (El-Zanaty and Way 2008).⁵⁵ The introduction of new penalties in 2016 is expected to reduce this number,⁵⁶ although the first trial on FGM gave mixed signals.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the risk of violence is associated with marriage, divorce and the Personal Status Law (Deif 2004). The criminal code tends to condone acts of violence when punishment restores “good order” in the family. The inability of the state to protect women with shelters or grant them equal property and child custody rights (thus giving them financial stability after divorce) discriminates against low-income women, and is correlated with the high tolerance of domestic violence.

Outside of the home, and apart from political violence, reports on sexual harassment (ECWR 2008; UN Women 2013; El Deeb 2013) have revealed that 99.3 per cent of women interviewed in Egypt had experienced sexual harassment in the course of their lives. After May 2013 under Morsy, and then in July 2014 under El Sisi, the Ministry of the Interior set up a 10-member unit (of which four members are women) against violence against women (VAW) (Saferworld 2015). The purpose of the unit is to work in conjunction with the ministry and to offer support for women reporting violence (Marroushi 2015: 8), but it has had limited results.⁵⁸

Although Egypt ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1981, the Egyptian government has never implemented it fully, but rather has done so with a series of reservations (Merry 2006: 96). Merry underlines how

⁵⁵ See also: “Egypt: new penalties for female genital mutilation.” HRW. 9th September 2016. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/09/09/egypt-new-penalties-female-genital-mutilation>. Last access: 15th September 2016.

⁵⁶ Ibid. The penalties range from five to seven year for carrying out the practice, and up to 15 years if it results in death or permanent disability. Medical personnel have been forbidden to perform FGM since 2007.

⁵⁷ After an initial acquittal, an appeal court convicted a doctor who performed fatal FGM on 13-year-old Sohair-Al-Batea, giving him three years and two months for manslaughter and mutilation. The girl’s father received a three-month suspended sentence. The doctor, however, reached a financial settlement with the family and served only three months in prison. See: Ruth Michaelson. “First doctor convicted of FGM death in Egypt only spent three months in jail.” *The Guardian*. 2nd August 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/02/egyptian-doctor-convicted-of-fgm-death-serves-three-months-in-jail>. Last access: 15th September 2016.

⁵⁸ VAW units have been opened in police stations all over Egypt, but they are either not operative or the personnel has not been trained (Marroushi 2015: 8). Major initiatives against sexual harassment, such as Shoft Taharrush and Imprint, have collaborated with the VAW units.

the Mubarak government promoted the idea that women's rights represent the new face of "marketing Egyptian modernity" to international institutions and partners – for instance, with the introduction in 2000 of the *kuhl*, a unilateral, fast divorce that women can demand by renouncing any property claims, an untenable option for low-income women. However, the government blamed the lack of CEDAW implementation on the cultural resistance and conservatism of the country and its people: for the government, "Culture provides a good excuse for failure" (Merry 2006: 95). This was still the case after the revolution.

Violence thus remains actively or indirectly encouraged through culturalist discourses by the state and the judiciary, in relation to domestic and spousal abuses in the family as much as to political violence. Yet in reconstructing Egyptian women's experiences as overwhelmingly marked by violence, gender-based violence is sustained by overarching structures which deploy the gendered politics of Egyptian identity. As Al-Ali (2014) underlines, political violence is part of a "continuum of sexual and wider gender-based violence" (Al-Ali 2014: 127). In her view, the challenge for feminists in Egypt and elsewhere is to avoid reinforcing the normalization of violence while also addressing poverty, redistribution, unemployment and neoliberal policies together with impunity and misogynistic practices. The materiality of gender-based violence needs to be tied to structures and ideologies of inequality, attached to an affective system of "alien", unrecognizable bodies, spaces and objects.

VIII. The materiality of affects and the potentiality of feminism

In fact, in a Cairo that reveals extreme economic gaps in the security gates and shopping malls that stand next to informal settlements (Singerman and Amar 2006), the stifling inequality of the country not only favours the wealth of the business class (and crony capitalism), but also damages social sustainability. The intensification of neoliberal economic reforms has negatively affected gender relations in low-income and working-class families, at the expense of the sustainability of social reproduction (Pratt 2013). The nostalgia for and aspiration to "traditional" gender relations is also reinforced by the rhetoric of the security state. Deniz Kandiyoti (2013) observes that coercive measures and variations in discourses and ideologies signal the attempts of the patriarchal system to restore itself when its existence is threatened.

The urban spaces of Cairo during my fieldwork showed explicitly how the management of domestic and family relationships was entangled with the coercive governance of the political. The continuum of gender-based violence was interrupted, reinforced and intersected by race, class, age and provenance in the urban fragmentation brought to light by the revolution. Barricades, rows of barbed wire, and various forms of protection, defence and policing redrew contentious sites of Cairo between 2012 and 2014. They divided bodies from bodies; spaces

from spaces; belonging from extraneousness. Between Morsy and El Sisi, an increasing range of land commoditization and eviction (CESR et al. 2014; Shawkat 2014a, 2014b), as well as land transfers,⁵⁹ proved the value of the land for nationalist projects. Militarization and neoliberalization not only made spaces “Egyptian”, but also made “Egyptian” those inhabiting certain spaces with certain embodiments and emotions.⁶⁰

Spaces not only exuded the oppression of the state, but also encountered the collective force and memory of protesters. Street art in several locations in the city, showcasing martyrs’ faces, Egyptian history and the resilience of Egyptians, showed that urban spaces were not merely subject to militarization. It is not surprising that digital activism in Egypt was influenced and inspired by the organizational limits imposed on the use of spaces for mass protest. Although only 32 per cent of the population has access to the Internet (Freedom House Report 2015), digital activists (and increasingly, members of the LGBTQI community) are political targets as they incite the use of physical spaces and bodies in “uncontrolled” ways. Several digital activists have been subjected to incarceration as they pose a “security threat” (Freedom House Report 2015). Digital activists in Egypt engender meaningful spaces of belonging (Gerbaudo 2012; Aouragh and Alexander 2011, 2014; Herrera 2014) amid the spatialized exclusions of Cairo, which – from urban gated communities to informal communities and policing areas – make gendered bodies stick out.

Commenting specifically on the Egyptian revolution, Butler (2011) suggests that bodily presences make a public space political and open to sociality. A space becomes a significant place according to the bodies living and acting in it. Similarly, for Gupta and Ferguson (1992) and Harvey (1973), the distinction between space, place and action is characterized by shifts which attach different levels of power dynamics and meanings to space, such as nationalism (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). This qualifies the urban spaces of Cairo as more than just a theatrical backdrop for politics and violence (Tripp 2013) – although spectacles were also part of the political field in Egypt. As Navaro-Yashin (2012) suggests, these shifts are affective, as affects are material. In the spaces of Cairo, affects circulated in palpable ways between bodies and spaces. Feminist geographer Massey (2006) adds that spaces are also made of simultaneous, multiple stories still in the making – stories of that street, that square, that idle walk, that dangerous corner – which a body absorbs, develops, carries with herself and becomes part of. In a way, language here is an extension of affects. Bodies “do things” to objects, as objects “do things” to bodies which reflect on them. Contrary to Massumi (1996),

⁵⁹ Ian Black. “Egypt’s president under fire over Red Sea islands transfer to Saudi Arabia.” *The Guardian*. 11th April 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/11/egypt-saudi-arabia-tiran-sanafir-red-sea-islands-transfer>. Last access: 15th September 2016.

⁶⁰ See Chapter V.

affects are not fully autonomous, but circulate in existing political and social relations (Hemmings 2007; Navaro-Yashin 2012). The affective “map” of emotional and bodily tensions that individual lives draw (Deleuze 1997; Hemmings 2007) is embroiled in and depends on another social world.

Under Morsy and El Sisi, vulnerable bodily and urban spaces became objects of both policing discipline⁶¹ and gendered subversions which reworked attachments to “belonging” and “protection”. The massive influence of neoliberalism and global capitalism in the controlled privatization and class divisions of urban spaces (Harvey 2013) and in increasing militarist control (Enloe 2000) converged in and sustained the discourse on women’s safety in Cairo. The militarized control of urban spaces and the social and political control of gendered bodies ran in parallel. Bodies and spaces mirrored each other as they were inscribed, from Morsy’s time onwards, into an increasingly militarized notion of nationalist masculinity offering protection to the feminized nation⁶² from a threatening “other”. Whether docile or supportive, feminine “precarious states” are thus needed, as they are inseparable from gendered formations of security that shape the politics of nationalist belonging. Instead, feminist and women-led protests against neoliberalism, militarism, legislative gender bias and patriarchy opened other possibilities of political and social belonging in the spaces of Cairo, rearranging their affective nets. They showed that the essentialized feminine content of “Egyptian-ness” was made of multiple and relational circuits, constantly negotiated, enjoyed and struggled for as subjectivities.

IX. Conclusion

Who has the power to establish who belongs to Egypt? In what ways did femininities in Egypt turn into signs of nationalist exclusion or belonging? In this chapter I have reflected on the essentialized construction of a gendered Egyptian identity which affected the political field during my fieldwork. By following various strands of literature on Egyptian nation-making processes, legal reforms and spaces of activism and violence in Egypt, I have focused on the main polemics of political life during 2012 and 2013: the popular and transversal opposition to a radical Islamist government; the constitutional erasure of women’s rights, and the Islamist fear of imperialist decadence; the continuum between state violence and domestic violence; the unpicking of terrorism from state violence; the spatial encroachment in Cairo, where exclusion and belonging are affectively and materially enacted. These polemics took place in a continuous process of “othering” that deployed historically established gendered terms: women’s contribution to modernity and the nation; women’s domestic labour in the nation-

⁶¹ See Chapter IV.

⁶² On this see Chapters III and V.

making process; the oppression of Muslim women. These terms oriented the political field between different, but equally violent, competing patriarchal authoritarianisms in Egypt: the religious authoritarianism of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the military and policing authoritarianism of the army and police.

Navaro-Yashin (2012), following Aretxaga (2000a), comments that nationalism performs through irrational excess rather than through modern bureaucracy and order (Navaro-Yashin 2012: 202). How was the nationalist power of “excess” modulated in Cairo? In the transition from the Islamist government of Morsy to the post-revolutionary militarism of El Sisi, the “excess” of “Egyptian-ness” was located in a culturalized “Egyptian womanhood”. This figure, interpreted according to various moral circuits, was the structuring metaphor for the relationship between the nation-state and its people, as well as a biased representation of the actual reality of Egyptian women. Through it, women’s roles, bodies, sexualities and capacities were constantly appropriated in instrumental ways to violently engender the political and social exclusion of dissenters as “non-Egyptian”.

The language of nationalist excess, and of its feminine symbols, was thus a language of violence. The Brotherhood fulfilled the fearful rumours about their dictatorship by erasing women’s rights and gender-based violence from the 2012 constitution; concealing women’s precariousness and political consciousness; naturalizing a cultural view of Egyptian femininity as eminently domestic; and defending widespread repression. Ultimately, the regime’s violent abuses and political inabilities fell prey to its own culturalist discourse of nationalist feminine weakness and political despotism: the bloody rise of the army appeared at that point as a nationalist, “protective” rescue from terrorism.

In light of this articulation of specific versions of “womanhood” as encapsulating a culturalized version of “Egyptian identity” in exclusive and violent ways, the position of women protesters and feminists in Egypt was particularly insidious. Feminist activists and women protesters in Egypt were continuously transformed into dangerous and immoral “outsiders” by the Islamist government, the security institutions and the army. Feminist bodily movements, reflections and emotions hint at existing and new embroilments which are still submerged – which are not there yet.

Contrasting activists’ initiatives and fantasies (Berardi 2011) then becomes part of the Egyptian nation-state project to prevent alternative and less controllable forms of belonging. The recent travel bans imposed on well-known Egyptian feminists such as Mozn Hassan and Aida Seif El-Dawla show that securities of spaces and bodies mirror each other in the complex and contradictory gendered politics of identity and Egyptian “otherness”. In the gendered control

violently implemented in the city, feminist and women activists exposed the continuum of patriarchal violence between the square and the home; between the imagined “Egyptian woman” and her multiple and subversive existences. The relationality of Egyptian identities, and the limits of nationalist excess, show precisely in the fear that feminists and women activists will alter the conditions of belonging, that they will prove that other habits and potentialities, outside the dominant discourse of identities, can exist – in ways that the following chapters will show in depth.

CHAPTER II

LIKE MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS: STORIES AND GENEALOGIES OF YOUNG WOMEN'S ACTIVISM

I. Introduction: genealogies of activism

In the winter of 2012, a series of paintings launched the activities of the short-lived 6 Contemporary Arts art gallery in an elegant building on southern Zamalek, the island in the middle of the Nile which hosts a (mostly) upscale neighbourhood of Cairo. The series, called "The Couch" (*El Kanaba*), focused on an item which is a symbol of domesticity and hospitality for most Egyptian families. On *el kanaba* marriage proposals and pictures seal a couple's official engagement, anticipating the scene that will be repeated on a larger scale at the wedding. From it, black-and-white Egyptian movies, political TV shows and new Turkish soap operas are watched and discussed. *El kanaba* is where visitors are welcomed, often surrounded by family mementos as well as by commodities proving the family's social aspirations and class (Makram Ebeid 2012).⁶³ Much more than a piece of furniture, the couch is a central part of household social relations and status. In the paintings by Eman Abdou, couches were represented against blank, often grey, flat backgrounds, their flowery fabrics juxtaposed with military tanks and the neutrally coloured figures of bystanders. The painter meant to question the extent to which the media had not only made violence familiar to Egyptians but had also accommodated it in a comfortable social space of acceptability and indifference.⁶⁴ The idea of the couch with which the artist was playing was symbolic of the large number of politically apathetic Egyptians who remained indifferent to the protests and disconnected from their consequences, referred to since 2011 as "*Hizb el Kanaba*"⁶⁵ (the couch party).

⁶³ These would be the *bonbonnière de Sèvres* and antique pieces for the upper class; for the working class, such as industrial workers in the state steel factory EISCO, *el nish* (niche), the most representative piece (*malik el nish*, the king of the niche) in the living room, is usually an expensive set of teacups placed in a wooden display cabinet (*nish*) and used for the bride's trousseau (Makram Ebeid 2012: 165–166).

⁶⁴ She clarified the concept behind her artwork in an interview with the English online version of the newspaper *El Ahram*: Sara Elkamel. "Flowery tanks: painting exhibition tackles political-domestic relations." *Ahram Online*. 30th October 2012. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/5/25/56728/Arts--Culture/Visual-Art/Flowery-tanks-Painting-exhibition-tackles-politica.aspx>. Last access: 5th May 2015.

⁶⁵ An article in the English version of the national newspaper *El Ahram* was published about the Kanaba party from the point of view of an Iraqi writer living in Egypt, Abdul Ilah Albayati, who called it "the silent majority". "Is there a couch party in Egypt?" *Ahram Online*, 24 December 2011. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/4/0/30129/Opinion/Is-there-a-Couch-Party-in-Egypt.aspx>. Last access: 8th September 2015.

By contrast, during every moment I spent sitting and talking with casual acquaintances as well with young activists – on couches, or on *'ahwa* chairs, *bawab* (building custodian) chairs or bookshop sofas in the best situations, or on the back seats of cars and taxis, surrounded by traffic jams, in the most hectic situations – I was fascinated to discover how much action can be shared in the moments of temporary stillness that storytelling can provide. Even words alone contained as much passionate action as the protests I attended in the squares of Cairo. If the revolution had left many indifferent – or unwilling to take a political stance, silently watching the events unfolding from *el kanaba* – the young women and men I met who were engaged in feminism and women's rights felt compelled to take part in protests, artistic strategies and groups, and had often done so since before the revolution. Their seats were not those of the spectators.

The many passionate stories of feminist consciousness and radical turning points crossed different paths in the personal histories I collected during my fieldwork. While the “couch party” denoted a uniformly indistinguishable group, the differences between these histories pointed towards a different collective unity among the activists I met. However different their positions and capacities, for all the women and men I interviewed, women's rights, feminism and gender issues were the common and permanent dialectical horizon of engagement in society, one riddled with tensions, contradictions and hopes. The revolution to them appeared as a moment of elaboration of gender issues, central to the changes demanded for the remaking of the nation-state in Egypt. For the majority of my subjects, this moment magnetized tensions at home, with friends and at university, producing and sometimes re-meaning them in direct political and social terms. At the same time, the transformative experience of the revolution often highlighted how processes of nation-making were organized by gender hierarchies and sexual differences that had existed since before their inception.

The resulting altered relationship with the nation-state and with one's own history threw into relief how the political and the personal intersect and are yoked together, especially for activists in their 20s and 30s. In this chapter I attempt to trace, through personal stories about becoming feminist, the “we” of a collective identity and the character of this intersection. In this context, women's personal and intimate stories of feminist practice and consciousness were linked to the macropolitics of gendered shifts in the patriarchy of the nation-state and its international non-state actors at large, and to the misconstruction of feminist subjectivities. The changing nationalist consciousness highlighted by the revolution was also appropriated by activists I met through a familiar gendered system, defined sometimes contradictorily by differences from previous generations of feminists and women's rights activists. The changes in the political field and in the relation the subjects entertains with the nation-state are

essential to the subjectification of women activists and the formation of a feminist and activist community at large. Looking through these facets, I aim to explore how different relational constructions of gender build women's activism and its notions of coherence and change, and how different actors sustain, or exploit, the affective force of this relationality.

II. The “I” and the “we”: fragments and unity

In the little room in the French Cultural Institute in Mounira, a popular neighbourhood south of Downtown Cairo, the words of Rabab El Mahdi – a well-known Egyptian political scientist and scholar on women's issues – leave no room for misunderstanding. As she shares her positive interpretation of gender roles in Tahrir during her talk on gender and the revolution, she is less positive about the women's movement in Egypt, which she finds divided, exclusive and dismissive of other opinions, including her own. El Mahdi's position has been articulated in a previous article and is not unexpected. In the years immediately preceding and following the revolution, El Mahdi (2009: 117–122) and Tadros (2008, 2014) respectively questioned the existence of a consistent feminist movement or organized women's movement in Egypt, arguing on the basis of its structure. For both authors – albeit for different reasons – it seems that the biggest issue is the ability to promote collective action, such as in the case of synchronized operations against sexual assaults in the square (Tadros 2014: 29). El Mahdi insists quite decidedly on defining the women's movement in Egypt – even if it is present – as non-feminist as a whole because it addresses questions of livelihood devoid of egalitarianism (El Mahdi 2009: 120–121).

What surprises me is that none of those in the room – mostly doctoral students at a more advanced stage of their research, which I have just started – asks about the assumed discrepancy between the consciousness of women joining the revolutionary movement and the feminists of the women's movement who also were in the square. Could the question about gender and nationalist identities in the square also implicitly question how the Egyptian women's movement is conceptualized – as structured or unstructured, as divided within and disconnected without – in light of models of gender relations shaping the Egyptian nation-state, the family and their politics?

There is no doubt that women's participation in the protests in January 2011 and the gender dynamics at stake in the square, as well as in the tumultuous years that followed the revolution, have attracted attention since 2011. Feminist academics and Egyptian women activists and scholars have underlined women's continuous and conspicuous presence in the political and cultural field throughout history, beyond the “woman's question” (Al-Ali 2012; Abu Lughod and El Mahdi 2011; Pratt 2013; Kandiyoti 2011, 2012), and have altered the stark

picture of the “revolutionary male hero”, free to protest in the square thanks to the support of reproductive labour at home (Winegar 2012). The attention paid to gendered practices and shifts during and after January 2011, with particular reference to women’s rights and position in the political field, have highlighted a more nuanced gender lens (Al-Ali 2012). Well-known feminists such as Hoda El Sadda (2011) and Mervat Hatem (2011, 2013) wrote about the mutations in gender roles and perceptions that flowed during the revolution, and their post-revolutionary consequences – from the negative connotations of women’s rights because of their perceived connection with the former First Lady, to the activism tackling assaults against female protestors. Hala Kamal (2015) and El Sadda (2013) have reflected on the ambivalences and perils of women’s rights in the new constitution, which was approved in the winter of 2014. As I will discuss in Chapter V, several analyses have focused on gender roles, patriarchy, violence and masculinities in the square before and after the revolution as a turning point for activism (Abouelnaga 2016: 101–102; Kandiyoti 2013; Hafez 2012, 2014a, 2014b; Pratt 2015; Seikaly 2013, 2014; Sholkamy 2011; Tadros 2016).

Research on recent youth⁶⁶ activism in Egypt now includes a small yet growing number of monographs about women (Abouelnaga 2016; Tadros 2016; Sadiqi 2016). The changing facets of young Egyptian women’s organizations are explored in the forms of new informal collective actions, coalitions and digital interventions. Gendered analyses of women’s labour protestors (Duboc 2013, 2015) and women digital activists and bloggers in the MENA region (Radsch 2012; Radsch and Khamis 2013) and Egypt (Walsh-Haines 2012) help to shed light on the gendered dimensions of the wide spectrum of well-established youth activism, such as the informal political network (Shehata 2010), the *Kefaya* movement (Onodera 2009), and digital political activism (Gerbaudo 2012; Aouragh 2012, 2015; Iskandar and Haddad 2013; Herrera 2014).

In the majority of these studies, the lack of organizational strength and strategic instruments is seen as setting limits on the possibilities for activism. In the case of the Egyptian women’s movement, the widespread transformation of women’s political consciousness after 2011 cannot be followed, according to Abouelnaga, by a structured and unitary women’s formation “in Western terms” because of the preventive strategies employed by the state to keep it fragmented (Abouelnaga 2016: 103–104), from women’s co-optation into state feminism

⁶⁶ I consider youth in the general terms in which Asef Bayat puts it (2010: 111) in the context of the MENA region: “a distinct social location between childhood and adulthood, where the youngster in a relative autonomy is neither totally dependent (on adults) nor independent, and is free from being responsible for others”. The figure of youth as a (feared) political and sexual subject emerged in the 1930s (El Shakry 2011).

(Hatem 1994) to the stigmatization of women's rights as ideologically and culturally inauthentic (Pratt 2015: 49).

While recognizing the existence of both a women's movement and a feminist voice within it, and of new forms of organization (Tadros 2016), Mariz Tadros too underlines how before the revolution, the main fragilities in the movement were of a social and political nature (Tadros 2008): general apathy; the co-optation – under the National Council – of previously independent activists; the processes of NGO-ization of the movement in the 1990s, which made groups more donor-driven; and finally, a reluctance to give more power to younger generations. Since January 2011, with the subsequent wider engagement, her main concern has been with the gap between the need to ensure visibility for the causes (through advocacy campaigns) and the thinness of the constituency (Tadros 2014). The Egyptian women's movement is shown as trapped between two seemingly irreconcilable directions. The first is the cultivation of strategic gender interests, such as advancing women's education and using media. The second, claimed instead by women workers according to Tadros, is the path of practical gender interests: "those based on the satisfaction of needs arising from women's placement within the sexual division of labor" (Molyneux 1998: 232). In this struggle over unity, already underlined by Hatem (1993), Tadros sees the main weakness of the post-revolutionary Egyptian women's movement: "While diversity is desirable, competing leaderships, different banners for organizing and internal disputes undermine the prospects of leveraging the power of the collective when it is needed" (Tadros 2014: 13).

However, such considerations are in line with what Molyneux (1998) defines as the minimum requirement to confirm the existence of a feminist movement and a women's movement: "a large number of small associations, even with very diverse agendas, can in cumulative terms come to constitute a women's movement" (Molyneux 1998: 239).

In this lack of convergence can be found the lively diversity and constant adaptation of the movement, and the breadth of issues tackled by the groups, as already shown in depth by Al-Ali (2000).

III. Modulating differences

Yet the expression of a collective identity as protestors in the Egyptian nation-state was not so much a structured discourse or network concerning the toppling of the President as it was an opening of an autonomous fantasy of the relation with the nation-state and with a collectivity of action. The revolutionary experiences that so many women reported – including Rabab El Mahdi – of rearranging the "usual" gender roles of public and family life also came from a political and social rejection of the gendered arrangement sustained and projected by the

nation-state under Mubarak. The new relation with the nation-state and with the nationalist project, both for the 18 days and during the following years, implied different politicizations of gender difference and sexuality. All the interviewees who were in Cairo in January and February 2011 described the effect that living and protesting safely in Tahrir⁶⁷ as women had on them – a feeling they had not experienced before, and which was even more unforgettable as violence was unleashed with greater severity in the years that followed. The informal collectives that formed, particularly around violence as I will describe in Chapters IV to VI, were as much a contingent consequence of political repression and unpredictable control as they were a confrontation with the hierarchical character of nationalist discourses concerning gender relations in the household and structuring the nation-state.

Because of their age demographic (early 20s to early 40s), the largest majority of the young activists I interviewed had not directly experienced or participated in any particular turmoil before the early 2000s. The themes that emerged in their personal stories are not representative of all experiences conducive to current feminism and women's rights activism in Cairo, but rather capture some trends and differences in the current movement and its sites. In many cases, the revolution was the magnet for their engagement as well as an unrepeatable acme. All of them, however, felt and discussed a sense of belonging to wider struggles – previous feminist battles, transnational activism in the Middle East, the Palestinian cause – which stretched beyond these moments and was largely informal. They had known them through other stories, films, family disapproval, encounters, and reading online. How was this connection built and why did it matter?

As argued of other revolutionary movements, the “women's movement” was not the result of the tools used (social media, the streets or art). Social media did not straightforwardly facilitate political aggregation (private meetings for traumatized protestors, Facebook pages) or the circulation of information. Gerbaudo highlights how, among Egyptian activists as much as in other contentious contexts (Occupy in New York, the Indignados in Spain), narrations and icons constructed a common identification (Gerbaudo 2012: 41) which, building (or failing to do so) on shared political passion and enthusiasm, translated into offline protests (Gerbaudo 2016). The emotional contagion Gerbaudo suggests points to the recognition of a collective shared enthusiasm or indignation built up through specific narratives, moments and social-media page managers, to explain action in the street. Here I look at the construction of a collectivity through a mixed emotional grammar – not necessarily shared, and indeed often

⁶⁷ Sexual harassment also happened during the revolution. However, it was perceived as quite limited compared with everyday life, and undoubtedly different from the violence during the post-revolutionary protests.

differing from subject to subject – circulating around a certain shared object. My focus is on the lively attachments to women's activism and feminism as politically potent for establishing a collective identity: one that coexists and may alter the relationship with the nation-state, affecting their lives in concrete and unequal ways, and particularly untenable after the revolutionary events. As Gerbaudo and Trerè explain, concerning the resurgence of collective identity, "opposing networks to collective identity disregard the fact that personal networks are not substitutive of but complementary to collective identity" (Gerbaudo and Trerè 2015: 3).

Consistently, the shapes to which young feminist groups and women's rights activists refer (such as NGOs, informal networks, individual actions and memories) and the strategies they use are not circumscribed by the revolution. The appreciation of fragmented or loose networks, not against but in parallel with more structured and conventional forms of coordination, suggests here the search for different models of gender relations and for a more complex political subjectification as Egyptian women and men – within a context that since the 1990s has favoured a certain model of NGOs (Al-Ali 2000; Abdelrahman 2004; Elyachar 2005) to restrict and manage the avenues of political intervention. It is a search fraught with contradictions and shifts from group to group, in parallel with their belonging to already-formed networks where they may act in different positions. I suggest here that the identification with a multiple "we" (nationalist, feminist, secular, young, emotional), describing such a thick arrangement, may reflect a critical remodulation: of nationalist subjectification as Egyptian women, which was asked to make a new accommodation of their multiple experiences and existences; and of the history of the "imagined community" (Anderson 1983) of the nation-state. The stories shared with me – with their various versions of feminist consciousness and activism, their conflicts and mistakes – are salient not just for the specificities of their autobiographical narratives, but also for the affective accumulation they manifest of a new meaning of activism, nationalism and history.

IV. Making stories personal: narratives, experience and legitimacy

Asked how they had become engaged in activism, my subjects' answer was invariably the same: life experiences of repression since childhood. The activists I met were all daughters (or sons, in three cases) of the last decades of Mubarak: they had grown up amidst the full expansion of neoliberal policies and economic decline, high levels of policing, political cronyism, the growth of radical political Islam, and the state feminism of the National Council for Women. Like the majority of young people in Cairo, they had found themselves in a politically repressive, increasingly violent and impoverished country. The experience of

frustration, invisibility and isolation in this social and political situation made it more difficult for them to experience what their parents had experienced at their age.

Many stories also spoke of resonances: they were familiar with historical and contemporary figures in women's rights activism in Egypt, and with the debates that permeated the discussion of women's rights in the country and abroad, to which they referred. However, readings and encounters in the field of gender studies and feminism often would come a posteriori, only to confirm a consciousness which was, in their words, already shaped in non-verbal ways. Taking the family environment as a starting point, Sara expresses her path to women's rights in this way:

Feminism gave a name to things which, until that point, had no name: they existed, but were nameless to me. I did not know how to call them. My father's domestic violence on my mother, for instance, and my mother's justifications... We never even spoke about this (with my mother); it stayed silent. It was feminism that gave to it a name. Later, it gave names to cat callings on the streets, to oppression, to my reactions.

Violence and the contradictions of oppression pushed Sara to explore further and get in touch with activists circles. The failure to address unequal power relations within the family and to ensure a legislative framework against domestic violence is one main reason for its perpetuation and invisibility in Egypt (El-Zanaty and Way 2005; Amnesty International Report 2015: 25–37). Sara's feminist consciousness matured through a passage from the silences of a half-conscious determination of oppression to the conscious "nominalism" of her experiences that feminist reading and encounters offered her later. Much more than names and ideologies, they gave her a worldview.

Accounts of personal "a-ha" intuitions, signs of feminist consciousness and formative activist events reoriented known cultural constructions of womanhood and intervened in crafting a new sense of collectivity. The formation of women's rights activists' politicization is consistently presented as depending on personal experiences which gave young activists the possibility to deepen their knowledge, rather than vice versa. Individual women activists were thus validated through the value of their experience in the larger political collectivity and women's movement; yet, in this process of personal subjectification, the legitimization of protestors, particularly in social media, was engendered by emotional participation in the protest choreography (Gerbaudo 2012: 39) rather than by ideology or experience alone.

A young feminist involved in important NGOs, Lamya, told me that in her participation in the revolution: "I felt as if my story mattered. It was exactly like the stories in the history book I had read until that point. I was part of them, just like my grandmother during her youth and the Egyptian revolution." Lamya expressed how her individual experience was now

meaningfully reinscribed and interpreted in a discursive construction of political collectivity as part of a historical revolutionary process, and made her a historical subject in remaking Egypt. Her experiences of protests and activism rearranged her individual self, the stories told by her grandmother, the books she had read and the city itself within a grander conceptualization of women in the revolution who were always against colonialism – or, in Lamya’s case, neocolonialism. The symmetry of Lamya’s and her grandmother’s experiences allowed her to re-establish women’s activism as a victory in nationalist history. As Aretxaga comments of Catholic nationalist women and men, who similarly merged past family experiences with their own, albeit with a different structure of feeling: “Individual experience was thus embedded in the discursive flow of collective memory that emerged as a frame of interpretation” (Aretxaga 1997: 90).

The pride and joy Lamya showed at “embroidering” herself and her grandmother into the patchwork of nationalist struggles give a hint of the cultural and social frameworks used to sustain their protests.⁶⁸ The meaning and limits of the personal and political are here articulated through a historical experience. Feminist author Joan W. Scott, in her essay “The Evidence of Experience”, states that “what counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straight-forward; it is always contested, and always therefore political” (Scott 1991: 797). For Scott (1991: 793), language and history are inextricably linked. Her point seems to nod to the validity of oral histories, although not as transparently given evidence of historical processes. But accounts of personal experiences, such as those I present in this chapter, are quite tricky pieces of evidence of the actual history of feminism and the women’s movement in Egypt. They are not without mistakes and misunderstandings regarding past Egyptian feminists. They are, however, a form of conscious framing of women’s activism in a way which can respond to a situation of political flux and existential indeterminacy for the young. The personal histories, and the restless world they verbally organize, also create a particular legitimacy and position for the speaker within a community of women activists and national listeners.

Margot Badran (2013) discusses oral history as an autobiographical process, using the example of her productive meetings with a young Egyptian activist, Nihal Saad Zaghloul, after January 2011. Badran sees a parallel between transformational forces in their country and their mirroring shifts in the lives of young activists, as related in their changing stories and the interpretations they give of them while they are still living those shifts. Incoherencies are part of the process of historical and self-consciousness. In this sense, personal stories blur and make less relevant any neat distinction between objective and subjective, local and transhistorical, individual and collective, fiction and reality.

⁶⁸ Collective memory is certainly one of them, as I will explore in Chapter VI.

There is, however, compared with both Scott and Badran, an affective aspect here in the remaking of stories, selves and political contexts which endows personal and societal change with a different meaning. Historical and personal experiences are not exhausted by their conscious and linguistic aspects alone, and are not necessarily elicited by questions. The urge to articulation, and the formation of this urge, matters. Human experiences encompass discourses and ideologies to include symbols, gestures, silences, drawings on a wall, images and texts flowing online, and multiple rhizome-like practical strategies. This chapter suggests that personal stories are a privileged cultural form in the deep struggle to establish both oneself and an activist collective in hard, troubled times. Personal stories can express strong emotional attachments to gender identity (male or female), to feminism and political activism for the nation-state, which in other activist forms – such as reports of rights violations or street patrols – would not be as effective.

V. Birthing feminism: between identity politics and defensiveness

How did one become a feminist in the years between the early 2000s and the current post-revolutionary period? For most of the activists I came to know, the answer was paradoxical. Although living in a context where feminists and women's groups had been struggling for decades to gain recognition for women's rights in the family and the public sphere, they had learnt about feminism and women's rights all by themselves, often through dramatic experiences. Having grown up in lower-middle- to upper-middle-class families, my interviewees rarely felt that their engagement had come from family examples or early socialization into feminist values. Habiba and Amal mentioned how the very fact of being a female still involves differential treatment in the household, despite years of victories.

When I asked Amal, a media activist and practitioner, if she knew any Egyptian feminists or had read any particular book while growing up, she fixed me for a moment with a sarcastic look, holding her lit cigarette in her hand and smiling at my question. "I was born feminist. I don't think feminism is a choice. The only normal condition of a woman is to be feminist. If she is not, then there is something wrong in her upbringing, in the society that oppresses her... [being feminist] is like having two eyes."

Manal's remarks echoed this, recalling her childhood in Alexandria: "How can one not be a feminist? It is impossible. Even at the table, being a woman means getting up to serve, and eating less, and being given less than your little brother because he is a male, although you are not less hungry, and studying less."

Habiba, now a researcher in gender at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, told me at length how feminism for her could not be separated from the family environment or identity politics:

Women's issues are clearly never a priority since one was born. Just being a girl, being yourself, puts you in a different condition. "They are not good," they say about feminists. I can mention countless episodes since my childhood. We are shushed, pushed back, we have to speak softly or not to speak at all. It is not appropriate to be outspoken and to challenge other points of view, in the family and at school. We watch films where women raising their voices have horrible lives: there is no happy ending for them. We are constantly discouraged... and yet I assert it. I assert the label: I am proud of the "feminist" label. Those post-identity things suck. Dismissing the label, being post-identity... it just means that you cannot impose any name on it, on the experience of it, even if it is there. This is exactly what leftists and Marxists claim about class consciousness: the same applies to feminism, this consciousness will apply anyway – either you are a refugee, rural, old, young, illiterate, fat, woman, you will fight back even if you don't call yourself a feminist. Then I hate the use of feminism as an accusation, when someone says: "I am not a feminist, but..." You want to reproduce the accusations against feminists. Don't use feminist arguments to then capitalize on the stereotypes about feminists being crazy. There is already so little support.

Manal, Habiba and Amal's comments conveyed a sense of inevitability linked to being born a woman in society, not just in Egypt. By naturalizing feminism at birth and comparing it to a bodily part, Amal even more strongly constructed societal and family oppression as a cultural instillation of false consciousness: women are born, and eventually, are unmade feminist – a De Beauvoir in reverse. While Habiba and Manal gave examples of early socialization into appropriate feminine behaviour, which shadowed their expression and position as females in private and public spaces, all statements were made in a tone of self-evidence. By overturning the nature/culture binary used to accuse feminism of constructing an inauthentic culture of womanhood, however, this rhetorical strategy risks falling into the ahistorical simplification of feminism and activism which afflicts some activists (El Kholy 2002: 205). Often the difference between feminist and non-feminist was articulated in casual conversations in a flat construction of class and/or patriarchy, in isolation from the culture where it grows and develops, projecting a "false consciousness" onto the subject of the comment.

Even though their descriptions of feminists were similarly framed, Amal, Habiba and Manal took different trajectories in life and activism, which showed the "thick arrangements" of their lives. Habiba was deeply involved in feminist circles, and started working in the field of human rights in parallel with a successful academic life. Amal worked in the media sector, "for food", while volunteering in the independent activist collectives Mosireen and Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment and shooting documentaries in which nuanced gender issues emerged. Manal stayed outside theoretical research and preferred alternative paths to activism, including

forming coalitions and fighting for her rights in the face of various difficulties and discrimination as a woman entrepreneur carving a space of her own in Cairo.

Habiba's reference to identity politics and her unapologetic embracing of feminism as a stigmatized identity label came from a still widespread attitude towards feminism and women's experiences in Egypt. Sahar, a well-known young writer who privileged personal stories in her somewhat political work, refused to be called a feminist on similar grounds. Her point – which she repeated at the UN Women's Celebration in March 2013 in Nasser City, to which she was invited together with self-proclaimed Egyptian feminists – was that feminism was a box or label that separated her from the rest. She was a human being. Her conception of feminism as an unnecessary superstructure, imposing a difference on an equal human nature, was articulated on a different plane in her artistic practice and engagement. The longest-standing and most successful project led by Sahar and her group of young men and women is *Bussy*, a theatrical performance inspired by *The Vagina Monologues*. Its Arabic title means "look!" but is also a play on the word "pussy". Bringing her representation of real "untold stories" of gender relations to various parts of Egypt elicited very mixed reactions from the audience, who were often scandalized by the style and topics and asked her to be more moderate. "But it is reality to be outrageous," commented Dina Wahba at a 2013 panel at Cairo University. This young academic and engaged feminist had joined *Bussy* during her university years, capturing the spirit of the group. Although refusing the term feminist, Sahar did not refuse to be subjected to the critiques encountered by feminists for dealing with culturally sensitive topics about gender and sexuality.

Amal's and Sahar's positions, often discussed with their friends, leave little space for middle ground: they both essentialized feminism inside an absolute, polarized, metaphysical nature/culture vacuum, for which indeed there were historical reasons. As Al-Ali argued, reflecting on the difficulty expressed by a human rights activist in choosing among the variety of Arabic terms related to women's activism, "women activists constantly have to be on the defensive against a vast number of charges ranging from their being "loose women" to aping "the West"" (Al-Ali 2000: 47).

I suggest that the defensiveness of the positions I have presented was inherited from a never-ending history of activists' justifications and fundamental misunderstandings, whose legacy still affects new groups when they face the choice of calling themselves feminists or activists for women's rights. The paradox between this level of linguistic (mis)understanding of identity politics and actual practice – which requires defensiveness about feminism and gender issues either way – was reworked differently during the experiences of gender-based violence that I explore in Chapters IV and V. There too the limits of the women's movement as linked to the

fight against imperialism were put to the test in confronting the state, and exceeded political divisions over activist identity.

VI. Careerism and moral purity

As the first site of independence from the family, education was frequently mentioned as a place of encounters with fellow activists and a formative site of contention outside the household. Cairo University, like the American University in Cairo, had been a turning point for most of the activists I interviewed, as they could come together with fellow students and start being interested in a more politicized life, especially with regard to human rights and artistic practices such as theatre. Some were deeply inspired by the presence of well-established feminists in academic posts in the departments of political science, anthropology and literature at the universities in Cairo.

Aziza, an activist in her early 30s, recalled that for her Cairo University had represented the years of the second Intifada, fights against radical Islamists, and the communist and socialist groups she was then engaged with. Ideological and institutional control in higher education had been a major concern for Nour, a researcher in her 20s who was involved in a party. She described to me at length how – between government interference, the army and the constant presence of Islamist groups – life at university had been tense and discouraging for those like her who wanted to engage politically. The politicized years of university students – when groups had fought the Islamists, as recalled by an acquaintance in his 40s and also underlined by older activists in Al-Ali's account (Al-Ali 2000) – did not particularly affect my younger interviewees, reflecting a certain depoliticization of social life and diminished opportunities for the young to participate in the construction of their nation on an equal footing with older and already established groups.

The differences in their careers and choices certainly revealed a growing precariousness and a perceived harshness of conditions for educated young women entering the job market, but were also symptoms of the limits of working on women's rights within the non-governmental and institutional sector. Most stories resonate with Al-Ali's (2000) framing of the younger generations of activists she interviewed in the late 1990s, driven either by "career opportunities or personal rebellion against their oppression as women" (2000: 110).

Sara commented on how she was regarded with envy because of her work as an independent researcher, consultant for the UN and active member of a leftist political party: "I wear many hats... sometimes too many. And this is something that many do not like." Mixed comments from mutual acquaintances seemed to me to misinterpret her genuine (if at times incoherent) engagement and efforts in several initiatives as "attention-seeking". With similar arguments,

younger activists who appeared on TV were attacked in daily life as attention seekers and wannabe celebrities in search of career shifts. The case of Samira Ibrahim, as well as of one of my interviewees, Malika, had received mixed support among other feminists and activists because of the aura of “suspicion” surrounding their assaults. The example of Noha Rushdie, the first woman to appear on TV concerning harassment, became more inspirational for two young activists I got to know than the support offered to them by associations in different circumstances.⁶⁹

Aliaa gave me the flipside of this attitude with the story of a mature activist who was forced to accept NGO consultancies in order to survive, although she did not enjoy being part of the system. Such comments continually reinscribed activism onto a “purity” of intention – almost a passion – which had to be proven outside the necessity of work, and which could justify only limited compromises. Working or volunteering in women’s rights was not generally considered to be like other types of labour, and accusations of “careerism” echoed Al-Ali’s accounts of young activists (Al-Ali 2000: 114).

The scarce but well-paid opportunities for young as well as older women, and the role in the past few years of international and new media (Sakr 2004; Wheeler 2007; Khamis 2011) – which tend to favour educated, upper-class, English-speaking activists – have reshaped “authenticity” through the notion of “careerism”, inflected by class and suffused with moral doubts. Yousra, a historian and long-standing activist in her late 30s, explained that she had abandoned a relevant feminist group because of the power pressures she had perceived, without giving up on her ideals: “I still don’t see any real improvement, even after the revolution. So many groups, particularly the older ones, are very behind the streets. Most of them are focusing on politics, I mean careers, rather than social issues. [...] Don’t monitor, participate!” A similar complaint was made by Manal, who felt responsible for failing to organize with other activist groups a large feminist event in Abdeen Square, a popular neighbourhood in central Cairo, and had found herself alone on the streets.

They do not go to Abdeen, but they like taking pictures in Istanbul hotels at international conferences and post them on Facebook... It is all very nice and I like these meetings too, of course, but you also need to knock doors, to talk to the people where they need it, to be there.

Manal’s idea did not succeed because Abdeen had been considered unsafe for the women’s groups she had tried to engage – a sensible concern which she had likely underestimated. Her disappointment was motivated neither by funding allocations per se, nor by the transnational outlook of the women’s organizations, through which she had met other women activists from

⁶⁹ I will speak of this in Chapter IV, on Tahrir and its violence.

the MENA region – Kurds and Iranians in particular – that she had appreciated. Manal and Yousra were saddened and troubled by what they felt to be a crucial incoherence between the popular call of feminism and the actual “politics” of it: a lack of “authentic”, “hands dirty” engagement on the ground without passing through development projects.

The difference that Tadros (2014) noted between strategic and practical objectives among Egyptian feminists can be overlain here onto the division between theoretical and ground-based actions. Accusations of reproducing elitism, of a top-down approach, of detachment from the popular ground because of the use of rights language and meaningless symbols (such as 8th March: El Mahdi, in Abouelnaga 2016: 16–17) partly explain the “disconnect between feminist activists and the wider female constituency” (Tadros 2014: 12).

Elitism was certainly a common (and historical) critique among several young activists, and was also linked to the “authenticity” of their cause: false consciousness meant in this case a misunderstanding of the “real needs” of women in Egypt because of the assumptions structured by one’s class. At the very beginning of my stay in Cairo, meeting a woman activist informally for the first time, the mutual friend that introduced us compared our interest in gender issues with the request by an NGO to provide deprived areas of Egypt with IT infrastructure – while the issue was basic survival and food scarcity. A Kurdish activist, familiar with several Egyptian feminists across the whole spectrum and with many of my interviewees, similarly told me I was lucky I knew “the right people” who were genuinely active and did not come from classist backgrounds or act hypocritically. Class undeniably shaped the experience of the urban upper and middle class and their participation in collective actions in different intersectional ways from working-class or rural women and men. However, although I did meet a few perplexing self-proclaimed activists, throughout all the protests and public meetings I attended I did not find that legitimate aspirations for nationalist change, participation in the protestors’ popular movement or political consciousness were the possession of a specific middle or upper class. Rather, the misrecognition of the labour of protest was intersectionally predicated on gender relations and their division of labour – as epitomized by the invitation to women protestors to “go back to their kitchen”.⁷⁰

Reclaiming, and indeed questioning, the “privilege” (Winegar 2012) to protest seemed for young women in particular to legitimize their agency and recalibrate their position in a struggle that now was theirs too, and not just that of their mothers and grandmothers. As for Lamya, it was a repetition of previous historical experiences of women’s activism in the nation-making process and a carving out of autonomous space within nationalist debates. My interviewees

⁷⁰ This episode is commented on in Chapter IV.

considered the streets of Cairo to be the space of contestation where their consciousness could bloom into a practice of self-change and political intervention, even when they did not join the street protests. Because of either state oppression or the lack of opportunities in existing channels for engagement under Mubarak (Owen and Tripp 1991), the expansion of participation in activism through various networks and the emotional support developed in digital spaces needed a physical space to be translated into collective action (Gerbaudo 2012). Streets became sites of political pedagogy. In the words of Madeeha Anwar, an activist for the Youth for Justice and Freedom group as well as for the Revolutionary Socialists, recorded in 2012: "What you learn in the books is totally different from what you learn in the streets."⁷¹

The spaces of the city – as much as their houses, universities or offices – were often assumed by my interviewees as a confirmation of commitment gained collectively in encounters with other activists and protestors. However, this was not necessarily always the case. Aliaa, one of the strongest human-rights activists in Egypt, avoided most street protests as she did not feel comfortable due to past negative experiences. For Malak, a young radical feminist of Sudanese origin, "Some people take activism as a checklist: I was here, I was there... I went everywhere. But I am tired. It is not all about that." Malak had stopped joining protests as she felt that her efforts needed to be channelled into something more structured as well as less risky. Her fatigue – very common among protestors – led her down a different avenue. As much as women activists felt – in the streets – an immediate link between their own individual experience and their collective experience with other feminists in the national struggle, beyond the formality of NGOs and within transformed hierarchies, they were also all aware of the volatility of these forms of temporary network. This ambivalence was not resolved by volunteerism either.

VII. A case for volunteerism: between charity and fundraising

Although a very limited number of activists came from politically active families, volunteerism and charity work were familiar to all of them. It is impossible in Cairo not to come across voluntary groups that intervene – in more or less continuous ways, and inspired by different principles and strategies – in response to structural injustice, state disinterest and civic apathy. Nahla had been particularly exposed in her upper-middle-class family to activist work as charity, a very common entry point into civic activism and a socially valued form of religious action across Muslim and Christian communities. She was the only activist I met who adopted charity as her main channel for feminist activism. She was the oldest of my interviewees, being

⁷¹ "Words of Women from the Egyptian Revolution: Episode 7, Madeeha Anwar". YouTube video, 10:55. Posted by LeilZahra. 6th May 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfG4Cp7tt6s>. Last access: 14th September 2015.

in her early 40s, with a prestigious business in the education sector. Her various volunteering initiatives, and her Facebook page dedicated to the voices of Egyptian women, took up much of her time. While her page was an extension of her personal views, sensitive to nationalist issues and sectarianism in a divided country, she felt it was part of her vocation as an educator; it was her status and *wasta* (connections) that allowed her to mobilize funding and resources for women's rights groups and spontaneous charity initiatives. When I asked why she preferred this type of activism over advocacy or campaigning, especially since she had been protesting so often in the square, she told me:

This is what I know to do, that I can do, and I know how to do it well. I can call TV journalist and key people on major media channels, and in a few hours we would be on air with our story. For certain humanitarian campaigns, like in Port Said, nobody moved at first. We managed to go there to give them essential goods, we even sent there a portable clinic. We did this so many times. I would not know how to do anything else, but in this way I am sure I can really make something with people I trust and I like – like Nazra, like Baheya.

At first glance her engagement looked anachronistic, no different from feminist activism in the early decades of Egyptian feminists until the mid-1940s. The Egyptian Feminist Union led by Hoda Sharaawi – a member of the women's committee of the Wafd Party, and married to an important pasha – as well as by Safyya Zaghloul – the wife of the leader of the Wafd Party, later called *um masryyn*, the mother of Egyptians – were mostly philanthropic in spirit (Al-Ali 2000: 62–63). Charity work and volunteering was considered affordable only by the upper strata of society, as it is a kind of change that avoids any radical transformation of society (Graham-Brown 1981: 27; El Saadawy 1997) – for instance, through measures of redistribution. While their class influenced their nationalist politics, which were often bound to a paternalistic approach (i.e. top-down charity for the poorest), this was often the only option due to the historical context, levels of education and distribution of wealth. Al-Ali rightly notes that it is perhaps more debatable why “populist credentials” are needed to give the movement credibility (Al-Ali 2000: 63).

Constructing her class and familiarity with charity work as a key asset, Nahla was certainly aware of her own personal privileges and elite status in Egypt. In mentioning Nazra and Baheya, though, she was also conscious of how valuable her power negotiations were, structurally, for resourceless and invisibilized or stigmatized women's NGOs and groups in the present moment. While charity might be interpreted as a private choice, it was in this sense a strategy of feminist cooperation. Aida, a collaborator with Nazra and a sophisticated academic, appreciated Nahla's support and considered her help valuable and needed. Nahla was also a funder from the Egyptian private sector – neither public nor foreign, and thus much less problematic in Egypt. The Egyptian law regulating NGOs (Law 84/2002) has imposed limits on

funding since Mubarak. Article 75 of the 2014 constitution partly modified this, allowing NGO registration by notification only. The new 2016-drafted NGO law, recently submitted, establishes that such notifications, as well as requests for foreign funding, can be objected to by the security apparatuses, de facto retaking control over the life and death of NGOs.⁷² Allegations concerning foreign funding without governmental authorization and the lack of official registration are the main reasons for state investigations, as demonstrated by the international associations investigated and closed down between September 2011 and June 2013, and the local ones since September 2014, such as the feminist groups Nazra and El Nadeem.⁷³

Aida and Nahla's remarks should be understood within a context where funding is scrutinized not only by the Social Solidarity Ministry but also by the National Security Agency, thus subjecting it to accusations of espionage and national threat. It is also a context where the public reputation and agenda of organizations and individual activists can be deeply damaged by their accessing certain resources. This put serious limits on the independence of women's organizations from the state, favours the co-optation of organizations, or pushes them into self-censorship. It is also a limitation for informal collectives as soon as they turn from limited-scope tactics to larger strategies of mobilization, particularly as protests have been cracked down on through punitive legislation (Act 107/2013). Funding still remains a controversial issue as the high number of competing NGOs and informal networks struggle to find resources to finance their activities and reach out. For the 16-day campaign against violence against women realized in 2013 by a coalition of young groups, the initial idea of also bringing on board an Egyptian-American artist for a large-scale project had to be discarded because of the budget. Hoda, one of the organizers, told me that they decided to go with a smaller project – a mixed offline and online campaign – that was more sustainable in economic terms, illustrated by one of the most engaged and interesting women political cartoonists in Egypt, Doaa El Adl. Hala, a young media expert working at Harassmap, told me that their most ambitious plan involved TV advertising, which was necessary to break into the large mass-media audience to

⁷² See: "Rights defenders criticize Egypt's new Cabinet approved NGO Law." *Mada Masr*, 11th September 2016. <http://www.madamasr.com/sections/politics/rights-defenders-criticize-egypts-new-cabinet-approved-ngo-law>. Last access: 2nd October 2016.

⁷³ See: "Egypt: unprecedented crackdown on NGOs." *Amnesty International*, March 2016. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2016/03/egypt-unprecedented-crackdown-on-ngos>. Last access: 2nd October 2016. El Nadeem is an independent NGO founded in 1993 for the rehabilitation of "victims of violence", including torture, political violence, violence in detention and arbitrary imprisonment. It offers psychological support and refers its users for legal aid. It also documents torture cases, and campaigns against torture and violence together with other NGOs. It has an explicitly feminist approach.

talk about street harassment. Because of its cost, it had to be planned years in advance, requiring specific programming and fundraising steps.

New digital instruments which have become available in the past few years have especially helped informal groups or groups working with creative tactics to raise funds inside and outside the private sector in Egypt. The mixed group working on Bussy, Harassmap and the new radical feminist collective⁷⁴ chose digital crowdfunding platforms to collect resources: Harassmap and Bussy are also helped by the professional incubator Nahdet El Mahrousa, which has supported several initiatives in the profit and non-profit sectors in Egypt. Generally, the young women and men activists I met showed a pragmatic but careful attitude. They would accept funding but not indiscriminately, aware of its provenance – in large part due to the economic decline and deterioration of political liberty, but also linked to the increased professionalization of the field. In this they were not too different from the young generation of the 1990s (Al-Ali 2000: 202). Experience of digital fundraising and familiarity with specific funds for women's initiatives such as FRIDA, Awid and MamaCash have become key. Above all, given the policing constraints, questions about power imbalance and redistribution versus charity have been reformulated by actively seeking funds from, and sharing help with, transnational communities of women activists and feminist allies.

VIII. Crafting feminism

Within the plurality of stories about significant encounters in the square and with other women activists, the link between the household and engagement in public domains of action is seen as both a personal learning process and a symbolic mirroring model. As with the generation that preceded them (Al-Ali 2000), who grew up in a moment of critical political impasse when activism was mostly forced to operate informally in order to escape the control of the Ministry of Social Affairs (as per Law 32 on registered associations), many gave accounts of negative experiences. Although women's status or feminism may not always have been particularly welcomed by their families, who leveraged kinship hierarchies to discourage them, a few activists had parents or relatives who were actively engaged in political fields and who even encouraged them.

As much as Sara was encouraged by her father to become more political, she also relates her initial interest to her mother's "counter-education": "My mother was frightened by my interest into activism, and to discourage me she made me watch horrible '70s and '80s films where all independent women do not have a happy ending".

⁷⁴ To ensure safety I have chosen not to name the collective.

The political character of the Egyptian film industry in those decades reproduced the nationalist agenda with its gendered plans for women. While in the 1950s and 1960s “feminist” plots focused mainly on (middle- and upper-class) women’s education and work as a means to reconstruct the postcolonial nation, in the 1970s and 1980s melodramatic “misery feminism” (Shafik 2007: 133–137) prevailed. In this genre, heroic women are shown as ultimately powerless, with no possibility of change in the face of patriarchal institutions, particularly the Personal Status Law, reissued in 1979 following the intervention of First Lady Jihan Sadat. In showing Sara these movies, her mother was also showing her a particular relationship with the patriarchal nation-state which promised a life of deep intimate unhappiness to women who tried to challenge it.

A positive experience of feminist pedagogy in the household was related by Maryam, one of the founders of Nazra: “My mother was the example for me... Living with her, for me and my sister, was a way to growing up with feminism. She showed us everything with her life, her work, the importance to think independently.” She later added: “That’s why I am not afraid of the label, I embrace it. I understand many refuse it and are afraid by it. But I am not. Having boxes does not help feminism or gender studies: to me, reacting with passion is feminism consciousness, and feminism is a personal journey.” In describing her mother’s “living example”, Maryam relates feminism to an unapologetic approach, but one subject to mutations and changes, rather than being a given state and label. Her idea of feminism as stemming from life itself, with its affective dimensions – moving states of being and reacting – was very different from the defensiveness of other positions. The individuality of her expression – a personal journey – recognized a plurality of feminist consciousness which may not converge but for which moving and debating are its vital force, and are part of her work at Nazra, the first organization in Egypt to have registered as an explicitly feminist group.

Feminism as lifestyle was a definition adopted by other young interviewees and shown through material commodities: bags bearing the colours of the Egyptian flag; pins and bags with feminist and/or activist symbols; stickers on PCs. Several stickers could be also found on the walls in the centre of the city and attracted attention as a form of advertising, from Harassmap to Shoft Taharrush (“I saw harassment”). “Who does not like stickers?” said Rania, one of Harassmap’s founders, explaining that they gave Harassmap stickers to shop owners in Downtown Cairo to show passers-by that they would “watch out” over the streets.⁷⁵ The circulation of these commodities and their recognizable symbols established a common identification within a circle of women, activists and feminists. I always saw Nahla, for instance, wearing clip earrings with the religious symbols of the moon and the cross, a symbol

⁷⁵ I look at groups against sexual harassment in Chapter V.

used to demonstrate support for the diversity of communities in Egypt and which she chose as part of the logo of the Facebook page she co-founded. The ironic pins with pop-cultural references – not all linked to feminism – given out by the collective Ikthyar, and those used by Bussy during their fundraising campaign, served as informal identification among members and supporters. At times some of these paraphernalia were sold for fundraising, such as the earrings of the group Baheya Ya Masr, designed with the group’s calligraphic “Baheya”. The “crafty” quality of these symbolic commodities certainly served to reach out and spark interest, but there was more to it. The efforts put into crafting, personalizing and choosing these objects, and the popular form chosen to embody symbolic belonging to the groups, shaped a quotidian strategy for visibly expressing identification and affects. The strategy used a familiarity with marketable gadgets: Nahla, for instance, noted that her rebellious personality and love for strong women artists such as Umm Kolthoum were represented in her teenage years by a Madonna bracelet. As a subtle strategy of cultivating attachment and manifesting one’s belonging to the women’s movement, the commodities chosen consistently refracted in everyday life the symbols used as icons in digital activism (Gerbaudo 2015) and in street engagement: they showed an awareness of multiple activist levels, times and spaces that needed coordination. Material objects and the affects expressed through them – rebellion, humour and support – emphasized feminist consciousness as a process of personal “making of” that worked through sustained relationships in a collectivity.

IX. Defences and mistakes: historicizing women’s activism

Maryam’s example of her mother “mentoring” her and introducing her to feminism through her life rather than texts or objects was quite unique. Encounters with previous generations of Egyptian and non-Egyptian women activists and feminists were more often initially mediated through books. For Aida the feminist spark came from reading Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* in secondary school. Habiba spoke of key older activists as formative for her own activist experience:

I started in 2001, with a personal visit to New Woman Foundation concerning their scientific magazine. There was a call for volunteering on the magazine for a project on reproductive health and I attended the meeting. Later I went back to New Woman again, this time for work: I got my first job there, concerning induced-abortion issues. But the “lighting a light” came from the director at the Cairo Institute of Human Rights. Her presence, her assertive position, her easy way of explaining how gender is socially constructed... it really lighted a light.

The “enlightening” experience reported by Habiba is an encounter which followed her voluntary experience and later work in a leading women’s group. Such encounters are bright spots amid implicit disconnections between generations of activism. The absence of

intergenerational contact is evidenced in some misinformation that generations have about each other, but in response to these “mistakes” activists pointed out that the long-term backlash against women’s activism had caused this vacuum and was reflected in the movement itself. Maryam commented that the 1990s were the turning point:

The 1990s feminism was configured as very Egyptian, with all the problematics this word embeds and which is part of the problem. With the younger generations struggling you still have older ones like Nawal El Saadawi, and you take the example of icons like Hoda Shaarawi, Doria (Shafik), Inji (Efflatoun), Latifa (El Zayyat). They had to prove they were authentically Egyptian, while working internationally, and this limited them with the liberation struggles. It is only ironic now that discourses on Islamic feminism are presented as an “authentic”, local development. You cannot compare Amina Wadud, with her life and her study, to the conservative piety movement books are written about, and to what is done in Iran. They are all completely different! All this has to do with the modernization approach, which we have to deal with still now.

Maryam’s reflection treats the limits of current activism as set up by longstanding political and cultural forces, which she saw as affecting current and past organizations. For her, discourses of modernity and authenticity still persist in the confusion that haunts the analysis of Islamic feminism, and these explain the dispersion of energies that has weakened liberation and anti-authoritarian movements. In the 1990s there was actually an increased level of engagement, directly related to donor-led agendas which controlled mobilization from outside Egypt (Al-Ali 2000: 79–80). The race for resources and funding pushed groups (with some exceptions, such as Nawal El Saadawi’s AWSA association) into the increased professionalization of the field, which segmented their efforts and scope in many cases. There was a thus decrease not so much in the level of engagement, but in the way this engagement was in some cases (hetero-) directed, and which certainly impacted on the way feminists grappled with the nationalist struggle. The question of authenticity – also brought up by Islamist women such as Heba Rauf, Zeinab Al-Ghazali and Safinaz Qazim on the role and status of women in the family – emerged in coincidence with a moment of transnational and global pressure on the economic market in Egypt, which put the family as an institution to the test. The Egyptian state also felt pressured to demonstrate its commitment to women’s rights at a time when international forums and organizations were weighing in.

Habiba expanded a similar view on this topic in a longer reflection, touching on what she described as the stigmatization of feminists:

During the ’90s especially and the ’80s, the movements were somehow separated from the ground and from other grassroots organizations. But they were also severely injured compared to previous generations which did amazing work, and which they learnt from. They could not get more vocal because they were silenced by the government and by male counterparts. As if they [the feminists] were not there. It is very cruel to be invisibilized like that after all they did. And the thing is that these

changes and transitions were not translated into something tangible. You can't trace how this change happened by looking at material sources, because they are not there. [...] At the same time, there was such a strong stigma coming from the media, since the movies which all showed activists as crazy. Alienation comes here, as activists are invisibilized.

Like Maryam, Habiba also connects the decades she grew up in with what she sees as a failed struggle against cultural stigma and silencing politics against feminists. Her words recall Nawal El Saadawi's comments to Nadjé Al-Ali on being censored for several decades, and thus ignored by many Egyptian women: "My work has been prohibited during the sixties and seventies, although my books are still there. Later under Sadat and Mubarak I've also been censored. I've been in exile. I haven't been in the media in Egypt. There are many young women who have never read my work" (Al-Ali 2000: 78).

Habiba describes an aggressive situation in which women's voices were dismissed and silenced with no consideration for their previous contribution, as happened to El Saadawi. For her, activist struggles had been "alienated" from the ground and disconnected from their actors in ways which were not entirely their fault: their battle had been co-opted by the patriarchy of the state and of society that privileged men's voices, and had been subjected to moral and cultural opprobrium as shown in popular movies. As with Maryam, however, this interpretation of the activist "gap" and difficulties has to be understood in a larger context: "In the 1990s the state and pro-feminists have increasingly had to take into account Islamist social and political activism, discourses and demands. Meanwhile, agents of globalization, i.e. the international constituency of policymakers, development agencies and UN-related organizations, also shape contemporary women's activism" (Al-Ali 2000: 85).

The painful constraints and invisibility described are a partial explanation of the women struggling in the 1990s: women's groups were varied in their scope and practices precisely because of the rapidly worsening historical context, which had started in the 1970s and had forced them to survive as NGOs (Jad 2006). The rising power of Islamists, the role of non-state international actors, competition over available funding and state manipulation had an "inhibitive role in elevating to collective action beyond the levels of network" (Tadros 2016: 14), which divided different political women's groups and depoliticized development organizations.⁷⁶ It is not the partiality of the changes that Maryam and Habiba perceived in the previous 10 years of activism that I focus on, but rather what this chosen side of the history of women activists can produce (Hemmings 2005). Both defended with love the older activists

⁷⁶ Tadros adds two more recent phases: the quangoization of 2000–2010 with the establishment of national machineries (such as the National Council for Women) and foreign-led coalition (such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), and post-revolutionary "collective action for gender equality" (Tadros 2016: 15).

they had met, and rationalized feminist “losses” and lack of present “knowledge” about them as caused by forced conditions they had no power over – censorship, male oppression, state accusations, cultural backlash. The absence of references to structural conditions – such as funding – is a meaningful silence here.

X. Generational oppositions and displaced conflicts

A different narrative emerges in the spectre of the intentional betrayal of a “higher purpose”: the co-optation of women activists, and the fears of the consequences of the NGO-ization of the movement (Jad 2004) which became most evident in the 1990s. The most disconcerting stories shared with me concerned this aspect. Rania mentioned how a prominent feminist she had worked with had taken advantage of her position in an NGO to gain votes (in exchange for favours and promises) in the districts she worked in and get elected. Manal angrily told me that she had been betrayed by a well-known NGO she had been cooperating with and which had hijacked the funding opportunity she was applying for.

Similar accusations were made against younger generations too. In relation to the entanglement of spaces of agency and young women’s activism, Sunny Daly (2010) addresses different research strands (Al-Ali 2000; Mahmood 2005; Bayat 2007) and answers local feminist critiques which depict young Egyptian women as passionless or locked in radical Islamist positions. Daly’s analysis of the resurgence of volunteering groups, in particular the large Muslim organization Rasela, critiques the optimism of “progressive activism” centred on Western-led liberal thinking and dominated by development corporations and their funding (Daly 2010: 64). The comments mentioned misinterpret both young women’s acts and their affective force, which are central to various forms of engagement. Yet it would be equally partial to frame all Egyptian women’s groups and NGOs (in particular secular ones) as dismissive of younger generations. The existence of divisions around “ideological rifts” and “cliques” (mostly of a political nature or to do with individual personality, Tadros 2014) is not new within the Egyptian women’s movement.

Aliaa articulated this reflection while we spoke of a young feminist I had tried to contact, whom she knew personally:

We have known each other since we were children; our parents were friends, are friends. You know, they are all leftists and shared the same ideas. So I was surprised that – when doing a research on gender discrimination at work – her mother just did not see the point. She said that she was never discriminated for being a woman. Sure, it can be her experience, but I felt it was so strange... With her daughter, even though we grew up together, with a similar background, it is the same: I think our take on feminism and gender issues is now very different. I was slightly worried that during a meeting she said that she was looking forward to beating up harassers with poles.

Aliaa's sensitivity to gender-based violence was due to her work as a human rights lawyer and researcher on violations against women rights' defenders. She was particularly wary both of insensitivity to gender discrimination among women activists and of emerging approaches in women's rights that saw violence as a preventive or punitive tool against aggressors. As the tensions around the protests and violent attacks on protestors grew, so did the difficulty of giving space to the specificity of women's experience and feminist points of view within liberal and leftist networks. Aliaa emphasized that a form of gender silencing had been internalized among secular feminists and women activists, such that patriarchal thinking ran deeper than the divisions between secularists and Islamists, conservatives and modernists, or the state and activists – as noted already by Hatem (1994a).

However, differences between secular feminists and women activists who identify with “progressive” religious discourses may be lived in a productive way, as happens among members of groups and collectives such as Women and Memory, Nazra and Ikthyar, who have different approaches to the same debates. While coalitions between different feminist groups were often bound to fail because of ideological divergences (Tadros 2016), cooperating with Islamist groups was usually impossible. Nahla regretted having believed she could work with groups close to the Muslim Brotherhood because she saw that the promised transversal aims were never to be confirmed by actual actions. It remains to be proven that the top-down development model NGOs promote is challenged (or resisted, to quote Daly 2010) by religious-oriented volunteerism and charity – which has also been used for political gain in Egypt – or in a lesser manner by digital activism. Maha Abdelrahman (2004) describes the relationship that the state entertains with the registered Egyptian women's NGOs and the large field of international development institutions as a self-sustaining, conflict-free circle. Although this condition has changed and many women's organizations are currently heavily repressed, it remains the case that the NGO-ization of women's activism, which started over 20 years ago, cannot be laid at the door of the young women who aspire to work on gender (Daly 2010), nor of older activists and feminists. Perhaps the point is not only to discover what might expand the possibilities for living differently which progressive activism fails to bring and obscures in other forms, but why antagonism among Egyptian women activists – conceived in such oppositional terms – sticks in particular.

The misinterpretation and inauthenticity of activism seems here to express more than an ideological/practical fracture dividing various groups. I suggest that the “hostility” among older liberal generations (Daly 2010) – who did not know the different meanings of feminism for younger women, especially around the issue of violence, and obscured their engagement outside conventional channels – may reveal a shift in the conflict with the authority of the

nation-state concerning women's rights. The material competition and frustration induced by institutional and international constraints on women's activism (primarily the lack of funding, the manipulation of fundamentalist opposition, the misrepresentation of feminism, political violence and legislative threats) were framed as a representation of generational anxiety. Elaborated as powerlessness or as generational incompatibility within the activist field, the conflict was transferred onto the activists themselves. The role of the national machineries and the National Council were symptomatic of that. Once again the gender hierarchies represented a terrain of internal power contention, removing the subject of the conflict – women's rights and the multiplicity of gender issues against the hegemonic constructions of nation-state patriarchy – and its psychic force from view.

XI. Generations as households

One of the most famous sayings during the revolution was: "black hair in the grave, white hair in the chair". This expression was intended to represent the conflict between the young, condemned to repression and a deadly fate, and the older generations (supposed to be "naturally" closer to death) who held power.⁷⁷ The attitudes of mistrust and dismissiveness between older and younger members was at times perceived as reproducing too-familiar patriarchal relations in a field which was supposed to be fighting against them, causing great pain. Rania briefly commented on how competitive the field of activism against sexual harassment had become, with a former boss capitalizing on it after seeing it gain the spotlight. While it had been considered an uncomfortable topic, she had refused Rania any help and suggested that she work on it outside their organization. Manal spoke to me at length of her pain at having been intentionally excluded from her network of revolutionary women by a major women's organization that was close to the government. While she had initially started the coalition, and had put lots of effort into connecting people belonging to different groups, she had been excluded once visibility and leadership were at stake. She recalled how she had been given a wrong meeting time, so that by the time she reached the office everything had already been decided: her network changed, her contributions erased. Someone else had taken charge, using the excuse of her lack of experience, leading the organization to a slow death.

Rania, Manal and others explained through various stories how, as in the family setting, patriarchy can arrange activist power relations in the feminist field, including among women, exploiting the gendered kinship of "generations". Generational language (such as "mothers"

⁷⁷ The opposite happened with public figures. Mubarak's son, Gamal, was to inherit the presidency from his father – a move which propelled the beginning of the *Kefaya* (meaning "enough") movement.

and “daughters” of the nation) expresses and justifies in metaphors the management of different ages and needs, constructed through patriarchal control of gender relations – which also implies a similar disposition in the relationship with the Egyptian nation-state.

Talking with Dunya, a warm, experienced feminist, gave me a most relevant insight about this point: “I would say that older organizations and activists should take this responsibility, the responsibility of mentoring. Yes, you can feel you are the only stars in the field. But you have a responsibility to mentor the new generations, for continuity, for consistency, to mentor attitudes.”

Dunya, a very engaged activist in her mid-30s with an incredible dedication to younger activists, argued that more experienced groups were at times reluctant to share their acquired knowledge and experience (the tricks of the trade) with the youngest. Her argument seems to offer a parallel with Elyachar’s argument about workers’ transmission of knowledge in Cairo (Elyachar 2012). Elyachar explains the transmission (or lack of it) of knowledge she observed at Khan El Khalili market in Cairo in terms of competitiveness at work and the potential replaceability of older workers with younger ones once their skills have been passed on. Dunya’s use of the word “mentorship” in relation to certain “skills” in activism – continuity, consistency and attitude – emphasizes what can be shared for the benefit of the movement over individual fears of replaceability. It is a responsibility that she sees as necessary for the future of the women’s movement in Egypt, and which she takes seriously in her own feminist practice. Looking beyond divisions and age gaps, she invokes a continuity in the long term – rather than short-term individual advantage – which comes from sharing differences and experiences. She constructs her point not through a vertical power hierarchy (“stardom”) but as nurturing multiple relationships of mutual learning that bridge different networks.

Aliaa described her feminist position in relation to other groups in these terms:

I think of feminism as waves. There have been campaigns for FGM, CEDAW, lobbying for family laws and policies... this is totally different from our approach now, and certainly it is an entirely different world from 1919. It is not about younger ages, but younger in terms of waves. It is much more about gender and sexuality now, about masculinity... really this is what makes it a different generation. We are not an NGO; we are trying to break taboos within gender fields.

For Aliaa, who at the time was working at Nazra – the only association, together with the new feminist collective, which explicitly called itself feminist – the ontological difference among feminist women’s groups not only depends on the demands of the historical context but is also linked to deeper relational levels, which she cannot ignore: a supportive relationship with other activists and collectives, and how this rearranges the relationship with the nation-state in more effective ways. She carefully disentangled her feminist stances from nationalist

propaganda, political volatility and the (unsuccessful) political strategies of already established groups. Borrowing from the Western feminist vocabulary of “waves”, she positioned herself in a dynamic process through which feminism and activism were reproduced as differences in transgressing cultural and political norms.

A few among my interviewees would not have agreed with her that such breakages are representative, or a necessary part, of feminism rather than a fringe component. It is certainly impossible for everyone involved in activism to tackle every issue in Egypt (Magdy 2015). Masculinities and sexuality are also not new topics of debate among feminists and women activists in Egypt (Davis 1990; Al-Ali 2000), even if local activists involved in promoting sex-positive strategies and LGBTQ rights remain comparatively small in number. Aliaa’s conceptualization of an ever-moving feminist debate is in this sense symptomatic of a larger question, rather than of her familiarity with the historiography of Western English-speaking feminism. Sexuality, sex and sexed bodies in the Middle East are often a privileged background where either external oppression or local oppression are picked apart instrumentally (Abu Lughod 2013; Al-Ali 2016). For Aliaa, the contradictory public attitude of some feminists and women activists towards Samira Ibrahim, an activist subjected to virginity tests, is indicative. Her emphasis on sexuality refers to a specific moment in Egypt after 2011 when the political instrumentalization of increasing sexual violence and policing was exploding, as described in Chapter V. Her appreciation of feminist engagement goes beyond blaming either local patriarchy or international imperialist forces: she tries to grapple with them both by embracing sexuality not as signified by a political view, but as a signifier of political subjectification and cultural constructions.

Conveying the difference from other groups as relational, Farida spoke about a charismatic feminist who was also largely misunderstood and marginalized for her writings on women’s sexuality:

I first read Nawal El Saadawi as a teenager, living outside of Cairo, and I thought, wow, who is this amazing woman who is saying so well all I have in my mind? So I find myself eating all the books she wrote, and finally I joined her once I moved to Cairo, once she had refounded the Egyptian Union. It was such an experience at first, but the more time I was spending there, the less I wanted to stay. Nawal is really wonderful, but the problem is all the other people around her. And this was the problem I had also with other groups. They have a very old agenda – with no wide approaches contemplated. Just think that in Tahrir, they were proposing to create a separate area for women only to keep them safe. Is this the only idea you can come up with? To me, the idea of starting our own group, with people who have different ideas on feminism, was to create a free space – and this was also the purpose of Tahrir.

One of the youngest interviewees, Farida had already had more experience in feminist circles than most of her older counterparts. Her comments refer to how for many in the square in

2011 and 2012, in the setting of the nationalist struggle, a new political enjoyment of gender relations came from unchallenged gender dynamics and hierarchies during protests (Hafez 2012) – similar to what Aretxaga noted among Republican women in Northern Ireland (Aretxaga 1997: 78). Yet challenged relations became particularly compelling too. Not only did Farida feel limited by the organizational management adopted in the different groups she joined, but she also felt dissatisfied with their agenda – which she perceived as too reactionary and as reproducing patriarchy.

This difference was articulated over the value of gender hierarchies and relations, and interrogated the versions of the intimate relationship between gender and politics to be put forward. For Farida, her uncompromising stance on authority, her dislike of short-term and individualist relationships, and her insistence on “the free place” she had experienced in Tahrir – the material encroachment of her feminist engagement and national belonging – led her to co-found a collective for gender research and knowledge production. Her words resonate with the wish expressed by other activists about the future of feminist movements. Malak said that her wish was “to make a movement like a place” – to make it open, free and independent, full of life and debate, but still warm and homely. In a city under heavy spatial control, and with households often controlled too, the street protests and Tahrir Square created an unforgettable reference point for challenging the entangled authority of gender hierarchies, policing and political dictatorship: “It reminded us that feminism is revolutionary at its heart,” Dunya told me. This spatialized conceptualization of a feminist movement highlights a feminist consciousness shaped by a deeply affective experience of protests, where possible mutations in the political field were closely associated with mutations in gender relations. The value of this link would become painfully evident in 2013 as the counter-revolutionary nation-state violently capitalized on the emotional force of this change, and on the gendered bodies and their collective spaces which carried it.

XII. Conclusion

The glimpses of personal stories about feminism and women’s activism which I have narrated throughout this chapter show a multiplicity of experiences and consciousness, accounting for a small number of the young women and feminist activists in revolutionary and post-revolutionary Cairo. In this chapter personal storytelling structures a cultural form – also used in blogs, plays, websites and archives – that aptly captures the thick constitution of activism and feminism, and their legitimization through affects. In contrast with analyses which focus on the structured organization of women’s movements to determine their impact and existence, or that concentrate on ideological divisions, these stories mark the importance of emotional and symbolic connections to feminist consciousness and activist communities,

immersed in unpredictable and constraining contexts such as contemporary Cairo. Through various structures of attachment to feminism and women's activism – crafted commodities, specific places, cultural objects, mnemonic links – the political salience of rearranging gender relations strongly emerges. It is the ground where, for my interviewees, new meanings of political consciousness and feminist identification link with the hierarchical patriarchy of the nation.

The process of NGO-ization, national machineries, and the contextual constraints imposed by Islamist voices, international constituencies and state crackdowns before and after the revolution led to a variety of interpretations and conceptualizations of the feminism and women's activism in Egypt that had preceded my subjects' engagement. Critiques and defensiveness about moral purity, careerism and elitism interrogate how change is related both to the reproduction of authoritarianism and also to the parallel reproduction of feminism itself, in ways which are not only structural and ideological. Generational language has been interpreted in this chapter as a conflict displaced among activists and structurally engendered by the state, with the complicity of external actors, by means of censorship, policing and funding regulation. Narratives of transgression, loss, powerlessness and spatiality speak to the context of local activism as much as they express an interpretation of larger transnational debates and the politics of knowledge about sexuality and patriarchal hierarchies in the Middle East. As homes and street protests were the main sites of consciousness formation, where individual experiences were transformed into communities, they also became cultural and political symbols of relational hierarchies within activism, households and nationalist politics. Within the level of volatility on the ground and of unstable and constantly reforming networks, the wide and vivid expressions of feminist attachment in these stories try to illuminate what animated the young activist movement in Cairo in its pre- and post-revolutionary years.

CHAPTER III

LOVE AND ORDER: MILITARIZATION, POLITICAL AFFECTS AND THE FEMINIST DILEMMA

I. Introduction

A hot early afternoon in mid-August 2013 brings the news of the curfew. In the café where I have come to study, the voices of Umm Kulthoum⁷⁸ and Fayrouz⁷⁹ stop; tables are cleared as the waiter politely lets customers know that the radio in the kitchen has announced that the Emergency Law will be restored at 7 pm. The recent conflicts with supporters of former President Morsy in Rabaa, a huge crossroads transformed into a temporary camp in the urban area of Nasr City in eastern Cairo, made this decision inevitable. I must go home and stay there until the morning, when we will all be allowed to go out, work, run a few vital errands and move around outside for a short time before returning to stay at home again. I let the puzzling news sink into my mind, trying to not be affected by my discomfort and fear at imagining what kind of threat such an emergency implies. Like everyone, I saw the images of Rabaa under attack two days earlier. Packing my few things, I leave early in order to reach home on time and allow the café staff to get home. Tanks will gain access to various neighbourhoods and major crossroads, and will close the bridges that connect the small island I live on, Zamalek, to the two banks of the Nile. None will wait for latecomers.

As I start walking through the spotted patterns of light and shadow that the leafy streets throw at my feet, guiding me home, I can hear with clarity the sounds of my steps and the buzzing and leaking of the working air-conditioning units that hang in regular lines on the sides of buildings and balconies, like giants insects madly spitting condensed water onto the path. It is unusual. The silence is frightening. There are very few cars roaming, no taxis in sight trying to catch last-minute clients, no angry queues at the petrol stations as there were a month and a half ago, no *batata* (sweet potato) or *bekya* (second-hand item) stallholders shouting their wares. There are almost no humans around except for the guards at the embassies and the people rushing home like me. I cannot even see the usually omnipresent thin, friendly stray cats. Shops and doors are already locked, their windows shut too early. The bloody exhibition of red-striped sides of beef, hung on the busy road in front of the butcher's shop, has been taken inside, together with the colourful fruit stands. There is no sign of life, or death for that matter: only an unspeakable, uncanny emptiness.

⁷⁸ Umm Kulthoum (1898/1904–1975) was an internationally influential Egyptian singer and actress, and is probably the most famous cultural icon and woman artist in contemporary Egypt.

⁷⁹ Fayrouz (b. 1935) is a Lebanese singer, one of the most admired women singers in the Arab regions.

When I reach home, my *bawab* (doorman), Ehab, stands near the half-closed doors of the building and welcomes me, relieved that I am not late, because it is dangerous. He then changes his mood: do I need anything before tomorrow? Do I have the new key to the door? If I go to Italy soon, can I bring a mobile phone from Italy for him? As he talks to me, somehow the subject fluidly moves to more conventional topics: personal and national safety are treated in the same tone as our usual little performances – some dramas, some requests – in our short chats in front of his tiny room, where the red-and-black 30th June anti-Morsy poster still hangs on the door. The present reality of the curfew overlaps with, rather than breaking, the spaces of life and work, like an assembly of lenses on a camera. The security guard blurs with the housekeeper, the protestor with the protector.

Dark comes in the room where I am staying. Silence is broken by helicopters flying over our roof, confirming that the patrolling has started. Later that night, and for the following couple of nights, once or twice I hear a motorbike driving fast, and isolated screams. A few unlucky workers are not able to return home and sleep in their workplaces, furtively serving belated or careless local customers – hence the noises. The TV starts filling up with images of horrific violence and death that we can only see through a screen or hear from afar. Such presences – perceived without been seen, seen without been touched – have a touch of something ghostly in a city I do not fully recognize.

When I left Cairo four days later out of safety concerns, I thought perhaps I had been mistaken. The “ordinary” wondrous chaos of the streets looked oddly “normal”, already accustomed to being shrunk by the time limits of the curfew and filtered through the ongoing clashes with Morsy’s supporters. City life looked the same: delivery boys carrying water bottles and *balady* bread on bikes; *bawab* policing the streets and cleaning the residents’ cars without much hope of winning the eternal battle with the dust; traffic jams, people living and working between streets, cafés, domestic kitchens, tanks, checks at every corner; the echoes of new protests every Friday in the roads of Cairo; daily body counts and scenes of atrocity on TV. Within this normalizing cycle of “business as usual”, here in this place that did not seem to be the city I knew, I felt a constant knot of angst, pursuing me into my dreams too. Upon my return to Cairo in early October, a fully militarized Cairo, still under curfew, welcomed me as the accomplishment of the revolution.

II. Gendering political affects

The celebratory and repressive summer of 2013, when revolutionary protests and a *coup d'état* merged with the deposition of President Morsy, provides me with an opening in this chapter to discuss the political production of affects in public life as part of the making of the

Egyptian nation-state. Terror, love and defensiveness in Cairo – between the summer of 2013 and the presidential elections – articulated and expressed a particular gendered politics of the nation-state in the mould of militarism. Although I have introduced the political and social patterns of this period of militarization as ordinary or extraordinary through a personal account of the beginning of the curfew, I am not interested in its psychological or uncanny effect on me as a researcher from a militarized region of the Mediterranean. Taussig, in his notion of “terror as usual”, inspired by Walter Benjamin, explains it is “a state of doubleness of social being in which one moves in bursts between somehow accepting the situation as normal, only to be thrown into a panic or shocked into disorientation by... something that even while it requires the normal in order to make its impact, destroys it” (Taussig 1992: 17–18).

While the media spreads forms of social and moral panic (Hall et al. 1978), I am concerned with the ways gender politically and culturally encroaches on the politics of terror and love at the same time – differing in this respect from Taussig’s disorienting normalization. As I will explore throughout this chapter, nationalist objects of celebratory romance worked together with political fears, put into activity by gendered processes. The soldier who saved an old woman in Rabaa, the women celebrating in front of the tanks, and the girls singing in videos for the army were counterposed with the girls of Rabaa walking in their white veils; El Sisi contrasted with Morsy. Similar binaries congealed gendered arrangements of protection, love, safety and fear in hierarchical ways – which were, however, not only discursive, and not only politically and socially destructive.

Powerful fantasies both fuelled and capitalized on the anti-authoritarian mass protests of 30th June 2013 to produce a new yet familiar order. Between the patriarchal views of the Muslim Brotherhood and those of the army, gendered bodies, roles and relations were materially implicated and mobilized (Enloe 2000; Goldstein 2011) to support (or prevent opposition to) the economic and political purposes of militarization. I define militarization with Enloe (2000) as a “step-by-step process by which a person or a thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military or comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas”, including “cultural as well as institutional, ideological and economic transformations” (Enloe 2000: 3) – a package of social norms and agendas that glorify “practices and norms associated with militaries” (Chenoy 1998: 101). This social process, according to Paul Amar, is part of a common trend in the global south of “humanitarian securitization” (Amar 2013), which, however, has to take into account the existing military-industrial complex in Egypt (Marshall 2012; Marshall and Stacher 2012; Abul-Magd 2013; Halime 2013). Through this chapter and the two following, I suggest that these elements collide in an affective economy. In Egypt the gendered

construction of militarized relations, hierarchies and subjects deeply relied on the psychic repository of nationalist symbols and materialities.

The relationship between gender and militarization is a mobile circuit. In her study of the Dutch empire and the supremacy of the colonizer's mastery over affects, Stoler (2004) notes that the dialectic between sentiment and reason was central to the political project of late colonialism and to the formation of members of its society. While she focuses on affects as the "proper emotions" prescribed for imperial citizens – in a top-down, vertical order – I focus on the reciprocal affective relationship entertained with representatives of the nation-state, with the nation and the state also in a circuit rather than a vertical relationship. In Egypt, a very popular slogan chanted in the early days of 2011 and again in the summer of 2013 epitomized one such crucial relation of affective unity: *"el geish wel shaab 'eed wahda"* ("the army and the people are one hand"). While the army operated as a "colonizer" in its own country (Rizk 2013) and especially in the capital city (see also Graham 2010), the "colonial differences" between colonized and colonizer were rearticulated in Egypt as an inner conflict of gendered familiarities and nationalist affects.

Together with the concomitant discourses of "keeping the revolution alive", "loving the nation" and "fighting terrorism", the capacity for reproducing, shifting and accommodating different affects played a decisive role in the acceptance of and desire for military violence, urban control, economic shifts and patriarchal authoritarianism. These affective tensions and aspirations reworked masculinities and femininities in ways which were problematic for many of the young feminist activists I met. Particular gender relations, ideas and (in)visibilities make it necessary to regard this gendered history as also a history of gender (Jacob 2016), in order to understand and grasp it amid the complexity of governing locally in a post/neocolonial country. Enloe reminds us that "to operate in the international arena, governments seek other governments' recognition of their sovereignty; but they also depend on ideas about masculinized dignity and feminized sacrifice to sustain that sense of autonomous nationhood" (Enloe 1990: 97). Looking at the militarization of Cairo in 2013 and the years immediately after, I try to pay attention to the "excavation of gender's hidden constitution" (Jacob 2016: 587) in the affective quest to establish sovereign power and governance in Egypt, which had been strongly contested since January 2011. How certain affects (terror, but also love) forcefully circulated to implement patriarchal control and militarization and reinstate a seemingly "familiar", desired gender structure of the nation-state, and the dilemmas this posed for feminists and women activists in Cairo, is what I will explore in this chapter.

III. Histories of exceptionality: the Emergency Law and the army in Egypt

The history of modern and contemporary Egypt cannot be written without a history of the military, that is, a history of manipulation and control embedded in the very formation of subjectivities (Fahmy 1997). During the imperial and colonial era, the development of selective educational projects, beyond the religious schools or *kuttab*, not only created the classes of servants and bureaucrats needed by the Ottoman Empire and British colonizers (Sayed 2006), but also led to the first nationalist movement, led by army officer Ahmed Orabi in 1882 (Bowker 2010: 54). The allocation of funds to the army from the 1930s to the 1970s – even to the detriment of the free education provided by law (Sayed 2006) – was later accompanied by exclusive privileges, granted since Nasser: the military was allowed to work less visibly, and to establish large-scale industrial production outside the conditions and taxes laid down by the constitution and labour organizations. While new economic elites rose to power by profiting from the country's liberalization (Salem 2013), and the police grew as the preferred security apparatus in Egypt (Kandil 2012) under Sadat and Mubarak, new forms of bargaining, regulation and competition began with the military presidents and their elites. Between 2011 and 2013 the army returned to the scene, carefully presenting itself, Turkish style, as the populist "protector" (Sayigh 2012; Ottaway and Sayigh 2012). While avoiding any association with either the seculars or the Islamists, it maintained its industrial, artillery and development contracts (even if they were not always profitable) (Marshall 2012; El Dahshan 2014) and reinforced its position with the Egyptian elites and other Gulf actors (Cole 2014; Kerr and Saleh 2014).

Any project to develop and modernize Egypt as a nation thus carried with it the promise of militarism and of the implementation – or maintenance – of control. The subjects of these projects (and projections) of sovereignty – extending both locally and internationally in search of support – were not only institutions but also and especially gendered subjects. This history was especially articulated in the control of women's bodies, justified through nationalism (Baron 2007), thus making militarism coincide with nationalism and a feminine nation. Nationalist manhood was also its product. On the walls of schools and army posts, slogans painted with figures of soldiers proclaimed that the army was "the factory of men" ("*masnagh el raggel*") in Egypt, the training of a muscular and unafraid masculinity to serve its country and act aggressively.⁸⁰ Yet most often, conscripts – that is, all males in Egypt, with few

⁸⁰ Several videos show training demonstrations given by senior army members to young conscripts. Hierarchy is always remarked upon. See also: Mina Fayek. "Welcome to the 'Factory of Men'". *Open Democracy*. 20th May 2014. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/mina-fayek/welcome-to-factory-of-men>. Last access: 29th August 2015.

exceptions – were employed on an annual basis in low-waged activities, working in businesses run by the army and de facto outside of any legal protection.

This condition of enforced submission of large strata of male youth, in order to serve a public apparatus operating within and outside the country and the law, reflected a macro condition of manipulated legislative normality affecting Egyptian society as a whole. Egypt has been under a “state of exception” for about 45 of its 60 years as a republic, apart from the 18 months between 1980 and 1981 preceding the assassination of President Anwar Sadat. The state of emergency was first applied during the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1967 (Emergency Law 162/1967). It expired in May 2012 – following a declaration by General Tantawi in January 2012 – only to be reinstated on 14th August 2013 (the day of the assault on Rabaa) for three months by First Minister Adly⁸¹ during the transition to the new elections.

Thinking through what constitutes the “state of exception” as defining who holds sovereignty, philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2005) describes it as an extraordinary legal measure which paradoxically falls outside of and abolishes conventional constitutional laws. Such measures have assumed the character of a norm, shifting from being part of exceptional moments to become constitutive of governmental power: “a threshold of indeterminacy between democracy and absolutism” (Agamben 2005: 3). For Agamben, who has in mind the terror of post-revolutionary France, the state of exception is not simply a “state of siege” or the application of martial law: it is rather an entire suspension and overriding of the legal system, by legal means, in everyday life – an unimaginable daily experience of violence and brutal rule.

With the Emergency Law, the de facto daily normalization of a state of exception, post-revolutionary Egypt saw the continued application of – and the non-necessity of any legal justification for – repressive measures against the opposition and ordinary citizens alike, which had consolidated power since before the ousting of Mubarak (Singerman 2002; Moustafa 2007; Reza 2007). These measures concerned the application of censorship, an increased number of incarcerations, and the punishment of non-governmental political activities (Abdelrahman 2004; Elbayar 2005; Agati 2007). However, they also included the internal expansion of security apparatuses beyond the ordinary while reducing the military’s public visibility (Sayigh 2012).

The 2012 intervention of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) represented the visible return of the military to the public arena of politics between Mubarak’s resignation and

⁸¹ Until 2016 it was applied selectively in certain areas, such as Sinai. However, the Protest Law and the NGO Law, discussed in Chapter I, created new forms of exceptionality all over the country.

Morsy's election in May 2012. Acting as a transitional governing institution, apparently taking the people's side, the army calculated how to deal with the first Islamist and non-military president in six decades. At the same time, it sought to re-establish its position among the politically and materially damaged ruling classes and economic elites, which had been threatened by hopeful protests and popular distrust. The constitutions approved after 2011 managed to maintain the possibility of military trials for civilians in cases of harm to the army (article 198/2012 under Morsy; article 174/2013 under Adly), and largely protected military privileges and interests. However, they could not increase the army's popularity.

IV. Lies and mockeries: Tantawi and the masculine masks of the military state



Variations on Tantawi's face: as a criminal; as a Salafi extremist.⁸² Cairo 2011.

Not even a continuous state of exception normalizing state violence, as in the history of contemporary Egypt, can neutralize the force of conscious contestations or unconscious, deep-seated fantasies and symbols. In a discussion of the "nervous system", ethnographer Taussig (1992) takes inspiration from Walter Benjamin, who was also central to Agamben's reflection. Unlike Agamben, Taussig affirms that, even within the normalization of emergencies, a series of "nervous shakes" always materialize, like dramatic peaks within the continuity of terror: "particularly in the normality of the state of emergency, what needs pondering... is the violent and unexpected ruptures in consciousness that such a situation carries" (Taussig 1992: 17). Ruptures give glimpses of an unconscious repository that stays deeply immersed in everyday habits, relations and bodies, cultivated through years of state control, and brought forth by new or similar acts of terror. In the anomalous normality maintained by the Emergency Law during the late Mubarak era, years of contestation against unpunished abuses by the police

⁸² Sources: Photos courtesy of Themba Lewis. <http://thembalewis.com/street-art#/i/21>; <http://thembalewis.com/street-art#/i/27>. Last access: 5th July 2015.

and the whole security apparatus exploded during the Day of the Police in 2011 – the day that officially started the revolution, 25th January. Massive discontent against the SCAF – which took over the regime during the transitional period preceding the elections in an escalation of violent repression, especially against women⁸³ – had already been calling in 2011 for widespread public contestation. Covering the same ministerial role that was later assigned to Field Marshal and future President Abd-el Fattah El Sisi, Tantawi became a villain of the revolution while heading the transitional military council under the premise of handing power to a civilian administration. Virginity tests administered to female protestors, and killings and mutilations of demonstrators were downplayed or denied, despite videos proving the contrary. Openly mocked and denounced by the media grassroots campaign *Kazeboon* (liars), Tantawi was accused of sadistic, anti-nationalist cruelty towards his fellow citizens.

A large number of street art pieces, especially concentrated in the central areas of Downtown Cairo and Zamalek between 2011 and 2012 – and often redrawn, either because they had been erased or because the subject had evolved for the artist(s) – attacked the army up until the election and the expiry of the Emergency Law. Several pieces of street art criticized the SCAF in the person of the Minister of Defence, Field Marshal Mohamed Tantawi, as literally another face of the state of former President Mubarak and his *feloul* (the remnants of the old regime). He was represented as a many-headed snake, as a devil, as a Salafist, behind prison bars. Tantawi and Mubarak's split faces would form one single individual in a street art piece in Mohamed Mahmoud Street. The piece evolved as months passed, with the fused split faces would be joined by President Morsy. Street art against Tantawi also included gendered graffiti. His homosociality with Mubarak and his entourage, in the piece "The People Want the Fall of the Lovers' Regime" by Ganzeer, is depicted through the warm embrace - surrounded by red hearts - of the Cultural Minister, General Tantawi and future presidential candidate Amr Moussa with Hosny Mubarak. Another stencil, by Adham Bakry, shows Tantawi's underwear sporting a pattern of helicopters – used to patrol protestors. The belittling of his masculinity – as promiscuous, corrupt, murderous – was a direct representation of his malicious, diabolical power interests.⁸⁴ The symbolic link between moralities and masculinities, sexuality and power thrown into relief by these accusations would similarly make El Sisi an object of desire and consumption one year later.

⁸³ I will describe this in Chapter IV, on the politics of sexual violence.

⁸⁴ Similar graffiti appeared under Morsy. See Chapter I.



Tantawi's underwear with army helicopters. Falaki Square. Adham Bakry.⁸⁵ 2011.

Despite the clashes sparked by military manoeuvres, the Muslim Brotherhood of Mohammed Morsy was an ally – albeit a lukewarm one – of repressive actions before and after the presidential elections (Tadros 2012, 2014), until his arrest. His face appeared next to Tantawi in graffiti, as another masculine mask of the military state. Morsy's choices were described in these terms by Maryam, in an interview with me after the fall of Morsy in July 2013:

Militarization is scary but it is strategic. Morsy tried to play the military guy. He hoped to please them in the government, and that they would keep their own interests and business separate. But did they [the military] ever leave? Of course not. Now it is obvious that the trial of the Muslim Brotherhood comes from this. Even if they were chanting for the army in the square in 2011, even if they were discussing amicably with El Sisi once in power... the army will never be an ally.

Maryam notes that the army's visibility was part of a complex web of strategies in which Morsy was destined to lose. The intervention of the army and its institutional representative in the government, Minister of Defence El Sisi, rendered it more prominent than it had been in the previous two years. The army's apparent support for popular demands followed the break-up of its tense relationship with the Brotherhood – caused by the government's incapacity (Kandil 2012, 2013) – and redrew the actors in the public arena. In the political gains of this move, and in the social advantages some hoped for, gender became essential, not only for singling out a major threat of the Islamist government (as described in Chapter I), but also for

⁸⁵ Source: Photo courtesy of Themba Lewis. <http://thembalewis.com/street-art#/i/17>. Last access: 5th July 2015.

defining the characteristics of political sovereignty, governance and social management simultaneously.

El Sisi's masculinity came forth with confidence, showing a seeming discontinuity with both Morsy and Tantawi. Sovereignty did not hide gender: it required particular visible gender subjects, from which it demanded love and fear. Intervening to save someone is a standard characteristic of the many examples Farwa Ghannam gives of the masculine trajectories of "a real man" (*raggil bi saheeh*) in low-income Cairo (Ghannam 2013), which can be extended to much of Egyptian society. The masculinities of the future President El Sisi and the Islamist Morsy were appreciated in a context which gave positive weight to courage, violence, and the muscular, chivalrous bodily attitudes used in public defence of the weak. El Sisi's presentation contrasted with the soft, vain or foolish masculinity of Morsy (Ghannam, in Jadaliyya 2013; Makram-Ebeid 2015) and the irresponsible and treacherous Tantawi. The political acknowledgement of El Sisi's momentous intervention was at the same time a recognition of his "real" masculinity, which put it in a different perspective and made him less vulnerable to popular critique. Masks depicting his face were worn in Tahrir Square with pride: they were not the masks of the state represented on the walls in the city.

But what this implied was not a symbolic relationship or the adoration of an icon: it addressed the support for sovereignty that was necessary to make it coincide again with military-led governance. Locally shaped gender roles were contended in the renewed and historically rich (Baron 2007) signifying role of gender in nationalism, and in postcolonial and modernizing processes. The material formation of gendered subjectivities and affects through the military figure of El Sisi and his supporters between 2013 and 2014 happened at this intersection of contextual grounds. El Sisi's masculinity elicited presidential legitimacy in ways which blurred the mystical with the secular, and which transformed the spaces of political support.

V. Engendering a masculine leadership

In October 2013, during a visit to a friend working in central Cairo on voluntary education for street children, I overheard a child talking about their drawings at school. The child – a smart eight-year-old boy – said that in class they were often asked by the art teachers to draw military tanks. My thoughts went to the children filmed playing "revolution" in the early months after January 2011, who – divided into two groups, state security and protestors – re-enacted at school the struggle for dignity, bread and freedom. New videos had emerged since then, with children singing the praises of military Egypt. What had changed? Why did the *Kazeboon* campaigns about the army's lies not work, ultimately? After the wave of protests against the SCAF and Tantawi, and the growing rage at violent repression and everyday

violence between 2011 and 2012, the figure of General El Sisi reversed the situation. Not only was the army seen as saving the country and El Sisi as restoring “Egypt to Egyptians”: Egypt would be willing to return to the state of emergency in order to eliminate the evil of the Muslim Brotherhood. Was this change due only to an unusual charisma outshining a less than memorable president?

In historical sociological accounts such as Weber’s, a charismatic (and always male) leader – an ideal-type, or purely abstract figure – relies on an extraordinary personality, and is followed “by virtue of trust in his revelation, his heroism or exemplary qualities” (Weber 1991: 216). The hunger for charismatic leadership arises in times of conflict and great collective emotional reactions: for this reason, Weber stresses the impermanence of this type of authority, which is bound to change at the moment it becomes institutionalized by bureaucracy and led by material needs (Weber 1991: 249).

The importance of conflict is not to be underestimated, either at the time of the emergence of the leader or in the process of his institutionalization. For the charismatic warlord, for instance, to become a permanent figure, there must be a constant state of war and a vast military organization (Weber 1991: 252). Because of the co-presence of these two aspects – the state of war, and the selfless mystique – I would expand the Weberian notion of charisma in the case of Egypt to a much less “typical” leadership, one that includes the magical and the religious but in which the fighter survives under a nationalist guise. Particularly after 30th June 2013, General El Sisi incarnated both an apparently selfless moral figure and an undefeated warrior – a charismatic military and mystical persona. His masculinity soothed the religious fears about radicalization that had haunted large parts of Egypt during Morsy, and responded socially to anxiety about manhood.

Rumours spread in Cairo that “delirious” Morsy supporters in Rabaa were claiming to have seen the angel Gabriel, or even the Prophet himself, in the camp as signs of the truth value of their protests. To underline the impossibility of these beliefs, the same rumours often added details about “real life” in Rabaa that would explain the permanence of the camp: money donated by the Brotherhood; illegal occupation of, and thefts from, nearby properties and buildings. On the other hand, El Sisi’s bold actions belonged instead to the order of the legitimate extraordinary. Representations of his religiosity – for instance, of him next to his veiled wife, or to Al Azhar and Coptic Church representatives – were as believable as his alleged miracles, from clouds shaped like his profile to portentous powers attributed to pictures of him. These much-reported facts manifested through him a mystical and magical dimension of the state, infusing the affective formation of nationalist militarist subjectivities with another level of significance. The popular acclamation of and belief in El Sisi’s moral and

political greatness reached a peak in the extremely popular song "*Teslam el ayadi*" ("bless your hands") by singer Mostafa Kamal, a rewriting of a classic Ramadan song, which started circulating in July 2013. The people's hands and the army's hands of the protest chants were now subsumed into the all-giving blessed hands of El Sisi. Just as his political and moral authority was fused with his masculinity, so he was reuniting state and nation in a dialectical synthesis with real (and symbolic) power.

The anthropological eye cannot miss the sensory and yet mystical appeal to which statism – meaning here the cult of the state mediated through the symbolic object of the president (see Navaro-Yashin 2002) – aspires in Egypt. The cultivation of religious identities through different bodily regimes (Mahmood 2005; Hirschkind 2006) also seems applicable to the nation-state here. However, the mobilization of love and devotion around El Sisi as the protector of the state and nation against the double menace – anti-state and anti-nationalist – of the Muslim Brotherhood should not be interpreted as a personality cult per se. Much as Navaro-Yashin noted in her study of the 1990s cult of Atatürk in Turkey (Navaro-Yashin 2002), forms of secularism and Islamism are mutually implicated rather than being completely disjoined. Unlike Turkey, however, Egypt is not a self-proclaimed secular state, nor is the state a taboo in the way that the nation might be. The population's relationship with the Egyptian state during the pre- and post-revolutionary years in particular suffered from a deep malcontent in ways which were not exclusively "cynical" (in the sense of being aware that the state is a farce but carrying on with it as usual out of self-interest) (Navaro-Yashin 2002). The will of the state, expressed through the presidents as well as the army, was distinct from the will of the nation – as the repeated "*el shaab yureed*" ("the people demands") highlighted with every political chant of mass protest. The state was in crisis. Its radical transformation was a "family necessity": the popularity of the *Tamarrod* (rebel) signature campaign, which called for the overthrow of Morsy and for protests on 30th June, largely depended on the distribution of papers by hand to family and friendship networks, alongside the distribution of signature papers in the streets and the hanging of red-and-black posters bearing the slogan "*Irhal*" ("leave"). The state during this time frame was not conceived as the privileged political and social institution, but was subjected to and produced – as a tool of governance – by the people, the pressing sovereign collective. In audio recordings and photographs El Sisi's masculine presence had become a supernatural, yet deeply manly, powerful figure that could reinstate a legitimate Egyptian unity between the nation and the state in more ways than one.

VI. The familiarity of control: a presidential genealogy

Nostalgic new and old posters of Nasser were held up everywhere during the protests that flooded Cairo after November 2012, showing him looking optimistically towards some

indefinite point above our heads – likely, a symbolic brighter future for his country. As was apparent from the number of posters alongside the waving Egyptian flags and personal signs, Nasser was the most beloved of the previous Egyptian presidents, embodying the strong (masculine) Egyptian state, full of devotion to his nation and definite leadership. This reverence for him revealed that he still lived a nationalist afterlife, and proved during the protests that the nation's aspirations had not been crushed. The devotion to Nasser and his myth was crucial when, in the early summer of 2013, Nasser posters started being held up and sold alongside a new face. A living soldier could stand beside Nasser, sharing his aura, only if he was capable of equal greatness: Minister of Defence General El Sisi could look directly into our eyes (with or without his characteristic sunglasses) from the air-brushed posters sold in the streets and held up in the square. The two generals were often depicted alongside each other and (to a lesser degree) President Anwar Sadat. The succession of presidents was a historical bloodline of army figures that omitted the “traitors”, the two toppled presidents – Mubarak and Morsy.⁸⁶

This political genealogy inscribed El Sisi as a legitimate member of the masculine political family of Egyptian military leaders – stretching even to the pharaonic dynasties – before his actual election. It overlaid myth onto history because of the extraordinariness of his figure. In a poster that circulated online, El Sisi was represented as Prince Charming riding a white pony (the literal meaning of “*el sisi*”) together with his King Tut bride (a crossover symbol of a feminized Egypt, albeit still represented as a male leader). The poster hinted that the future president was the saviour and lover of Egypt as a historical nation in the midst of a battlefield. The couple moved under a sky where the moon and the sun, symbols of the lovers, were surrounded by stars shining with the colours of the Egyptian flag. At their back, an exaggerated number of Photoshopped pyramids showed the giant faces of Nasser and Sadat gazing benevolently at the bride and groom: El Sisi himself doubled here as a president next to Sadat, looking directly at the viewer in his army suit. Under their feet, scenes of battle were shown in sepia colours above the river Nile. The poster could be read as saying: *“a manly president, a bride as beautiful as the moon — this is Egypt, Americans”*.

The symbols and somewhat kitsch graphic design present in this poster were a pastiche of images commonly used in other posters (the Nile; the anti-US feelings; the moon and the sun

⁸⁶ Gamal Abdel Nasser was not the first president of Egypt. The first president of Egypt was Muhammed Naguib, a high-ranking army soldier who led the coup against King Farouk. After one year in power, Naguib was replaced by one of his young officers, Nasser, and held under house arrest for 18 years. El Sisi took action against President Morsy after a single year of government – as Nasser had done. Source: photo by AP. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26188023>. Last access: 5th July 2015.

as the couple; the former presidents and Pharaoh Ramses, suggesting the name RamSisi) whose layered meanings would be clear to practically any Egyptian. Compared with other posters, however, this one highlighted more explicitly where the sense of historical succession and legitimacy lay. The military background and strategic leadership also represented other “familiar” scenarios which could now be appropriated, both in the gendered ideal of a protective groom and in the muscular nationalist leader: an assertive masculinity that takes action at all costs; the unselfish saviour of the woman/nation as her lover/state leader; the historical union of Egypt as a militarized nation-state.

The growing relationship between the state and the nation with which he appeared to identify and which he sought to revive was reinforced by El Sisi during his first TV interview in early May 2014. Discussing his strong aptitude for leadership, El Sisi opened his official political campaign for the presidential elections by bringing together particular nationalist memories that were affectively imbued. Answering the questions of anchors from the privately owned CBC and ONTV satellite stations, he presented himself as another Nasser rather than a successor to Sadat, Mubarak or Morsy. El Sisi stated his strong wish to be Nasser: “not just a portrait but a photo and a voice carved in the hearts”.⁸⁷ This identification through their common military background pointed to something deeper. Intimate yet collective “reasons of the heart” touched the entire nation with evocative, sensory materialities that had an “aura” of indefinite reproducibility without losing their quality (Benjamin 2008). A picture or voice (see Hirschkind 2006) would render the state alive and present, in its bodily qualities and attitudes, to the sensibilities of the nation. Hence his legitimacy and ability to lead the country were based not only on his military preparation and rationality, but also on his inheritance of Nasser’s ability to connect with the people, to love and be loved by the nation, taking it in a “manly” way to a glorious “happy ending”. His use of emotional tones in relation to his own masculine persona, and to the nation as a bride, continued in the course of the interview: he added, among other things, that he had chosen to join the army after seeing the heavy impact on Egyptians of the 1967 defeat in the war against Israel. Threats to the sovereignty of the country served to demonstrate that the true core of the nation-state lay in a particular familiar thread of its military history. The strong emotions called upon in the interview connected his figure of nationalist “belief” and statist “mysticism” in a relation-vocation with the military nation-state.

⁸⁷ “I wish I was Gamal Abdel Nasser, says El Sisi”. *Al Ahram Online*. 5th May 2014. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/100583/Egypt/Politics-/I-wish-I-was-Gamal-Abdel-Nasser,-ElSisi-says.aspx>. Last access: 2nd July 2015.

The nation, then, was the domain in which to seek to revive the state – to seek an unconscious, irresistible force that would live in the everyday. While Morsy countered accusations that “democracy is not made in the ballot box” by insisting a dozen times in his final speech on the rational “legitimacy” (*sharaaya*) of his mandate, which he had gained in free elections, El Sisi publicly stated that he would listen to the will of the people, which demanded the arrest of the President. This move engendered the state and the people in the political field as two partners moved by mutual affective resonance – created by the General’s disposition and masculine mystique – that would perfect what Nasser had begun before him. The nation would then “hand over” its will to the army as a selfless public servant: both would be acting on their own decision and love, mingling the autonomous liberal subject with fantasies of romance and the nationalist love of the crowd. The dynamic of the “familiar” political succession of presidential figures, ascending through their shared military background, rested at this point on the much greater project of saving the state. If cynicism was to be found anywhere, it was on the side of the state institutions: conscious of their “farcical” power, they grappled with nationalist affects in order to ensure their own survival in their material world – which for the army meant its entire existence as a service provider, an economic power and a ruling class.⁸⁸ As a consequence, the sliding economy of affects, and the parallel accompaniment of love and terror, supported the uncontested application of the “state of emergency” and the militarization of Egypt. In this affective circulation, material culture evoked and pulled at political emotions that had a crucial weight in the public arena.

VII. Love and fetishism: materializing desire

The intensely emotional support for El Sisi as the presidential figure and the equally intense refusal of the former president were translating into a pattern of increased gendered order and an accepted institutionalization which mingled fears with pleasures in popular habits. The affective life of the state was revealed by the expressive commodities that invaded the market with portrayals of El Sisi from his first political steps onwards. For months El Sisi-branded goods flooded the Egyptian market and online spaces, just as revolution-branded goods had done two years before. These ranged from the ever-present El Sisi masks (which replaced the Guy Fawkes masks of the Tahrir protestors) and fake ID cards to paraphernalia catering differently to women and men: chocolates and cupcakes bearing his face, calling him saviour and hero; hearty sandwiches and cooking oil; finally, feminine underwear, jewellery, and perfumes for men. These objects moved large numbers of people into a process of identification. They reconsolidated faith in the state, the army and the (limited) inclusiveness

⁸⁸ In Chapter V I will look at some aspects of the military-industrial complex in Egypt through urban developments in Cairo.

of the nation-state, presented by the intervention of the army as a reappropriation of Egypt after “colonization” by the Muslim Brotherhood.

Fetishism can be invoked in this regard, in the sense in which Michael Taussig has discussed it – via Benjamin and Marx – as political commodification. Taussig notes that in the state people become things, while things themselves (and the state) become magical, a mimetic representation of real entities (Taussig 1992:111). An anonymous and humorous Egyptian Tumblr account named “SisiFetish”, which collected several of the images used as illustrations in this chapter, seems to understand the mass marketization of El Sisi commodities in similar ways.

There was something in these commodities, however, that makes me suggest that they were more than substitutive fetishes. The acquisition of El Sisi commodities could not substitute by itself for the political confidence of the crowd, which had been achieved twice in two years with the participation of millions of people in mass demonstrations against the presidents and with their bonding in the square. El Sisi goods were not just supposed to placate or absorb revolutionary sentiments: they were supposed to help to slide affects towards a desire for the state, which was embodied as much as carried by El Sisi.

It is arguable whether these commodities, which were mostly averagely priced, could be afforded by the large majority of the Egyptian population, who had limited means. Yet the creation and diffusion of such products, especially after 30th June, shows that they targeted and induced some particular desires. They did not quite offer a mimetic performance, but rather an experience of identification – partly conscious – that personified the state as a vital necessity, fitting it into a familiar economy of political and social desires. All these objects related to a politics of intimacy or domesticity of daily life: the basic staples for nourishing a family, such as cooking oil and potatoes; the *sandawitsch* (sandwiches) commonly sold everywhere in Egypt; personal care and self-presentation, differentiated for women and men. The army’s economic empire already produced everyday goods widely found in Egypt, such as water and pasta. But with these specific items, El Sisi himself – and more indirectly the military and its blurring role with the state – was experienced and aspired to: loving nationalist guidance, an honourable man of the state, a supernatural warrior for order. The commodities branded “El Sisi” worked as particular gendered economies of the militarization of everyday life. They carried the magic of the President – his masculinity, his paternal care; his military strength for the good of the nation-state; the power of his romantic-nationalist attraction. The heart-shaped vapour trail became a celebratory practice of the air force for El Sisi, repeated at crucial protests and celebrations

These aspects went far beyond merely propagandistic representations or consumption. Commodities did not hold back the “force” of El Sisi because they simply could not. Nour's account of a serious comment, made by a coffee reader she went to visit during that summer of 2013 (“I would accept to be raped by El Sisi”), can be interpreted, in its extremity, as the expression of El Sisi's irresistibility. The 2014 claims about having found a cure for HIV and a treatment for hepatitis with a kebab aptly named Complete Cure⁸⁹ (or CC, also read “Sisi”) had a similar significance. Commodities “rippled out” from El Sisi's power and political force to extents which would not be possible in ordinary circumstances. The profane existed because of, and together with, the mystical.

Thus the gendered nation-state and the righteous masculinities these objects projected reopened in multiple ways the discourse of the necessity of army and police violence. They marked shifting political roles and relations – not only trading in performances of identity, as argued for instance by Sherene Seikaly⁹⁰ – assigned to men and women, in ways which felt familiar, desirable and unthreatening. The same objects were in fact also reminders to consumers – differentiated in their gender aspirations – of the political duty and social investment demanded of them in order to re-establish secure order: the relational value they put on the nation. The affective capital of the nation was put centre stage in order to conceal pressing demands and the crisis of the ruling elite in the face of popular discontent.

VIII. The romance of the military state

The omnipresence of the El Sisi romance showed in the different representations of his male and female supporters. It developed into practices which articulated masculinity and femininity in gender relations and hierarchies that structured romantic, family, nationalist and military love equivalently. To love El Sisi was to love the nation; to vote yes to his constitution was to vote for the revolution, as the uncountable billboards repeated in each of the main roads of Cairo, legitimizing his position as changer and yet resolving 30th June and 25th January 2011 with an institutional preclusion of further protests; to buy commodities bearing his name or face, just as with revolution-inspired commodities in 2011, was to support the country and incorporate politics into everyday life and romance; ultimately, to love the army as the loyal state institution was to love the nation, and vice versa. From Minister of Defence to “reluctant” candidate and finally to acclaimed president, institutionalization increased together with El Sisi's popularity – rather than inversely decreasing, as Weber would predict.

⁸⁹ “CC for complete cure.” *Mada Masr.* 25th February 2014. <http://www.madamasr.com/news/cc-complete-cure>. Last access: 3 July 2015.

⁹⁰ Dalia Rabie, “Sisi and his women”. *Mada Masr.* 25th May 2014. <http://www.madamasr.com/en/2014/05/25/feature/politics/sisi-and-his-women>. Last access: 20 October 2016.

As Charles Lindholm states in his analysis of charismatic leaders, “charisma offers the strength and the imagination for achieving change. Yet it also can be, contrary to Weber, a factor in maintaining order” (Lindholm 1990: 209).

Lindholm considers love and charisma to be similar but mutually exclusive forms of transcendent self-loss; even though he briefly touches on the role of nationalism as a projection of desire and identities onto the nation, he considers love an apolitical emotion (see Lindholm 1990: 211). Because of the centrality of love between 2013 and 2014, at the peak of nationalism and statism, I tend instead towards literature that has elaborated on the nation as the locus of political love (Anderson 1983; McClintock 1995; Yuval-Davis 1997; Ahmed 2004). Ahmed underlines that the feminine face of the nation is not simply a representation but “the gendering of what the nation takes to be as itself (the masculine subject) through what it has (the feminine object)” (Ahmed 2004: 136).

But what about the “mad love” for the military state, despite the violence? It can be suggested that figures of authoritarianism need to be in a dynamic gender relationship in the public political arena – which comes to be structured and even divided by this relationship in particular ways – in association with locally valued gender relationships and affects. Gender crafted “familiar” intersections, reforming a familiar history of romance as both nationalism and militarization, and reconstructing the subjects/objects of peoplehood and state. For many men, El Sisi was loved as an “*abdo*”, a relative of Nasser and a man belonging to his people. Thus their “own” president entertained a form of personal and paternal kinship – not of the brotherhood or sisterhood exemplified in many accounts of protests by activists. It was charged with the respect due to an older and wiser male family member who watched their back, as the army was implicitly assumed to do, and who must be obeyed. The state and the people were separated and objectified as an effect of this representation that reallocated gender relations under a protective armed manhood. El Sisi presented himself as a masculine model of protection and control, out of love: gender became meaningful in relation not just to nationalism, but to military nationalism. But was it protection alone that defined “Egyptian women” as an abstract entity in need, in the family and especially outside,⁹¹ in the face of the threat of Islamist terrorists? There are parallel dynamics at play in the masculinities and femininities which coalesced around El Sisi, and the role that women and men were given in domestic and political spaces. Women under El Sisi started being of interest as potential voters and carriers of support for authority, including in the role of “victims” of violence – but much less so as peers in the same political field. Among the various women’s roles which emerged,

⁹¹ Chapters IV and V will look at the application of this role in relation to gender-based violence.

those of the army wife and mother began to be juxtaposed against the killjoys – the rebellious women, the disobedient feminists and women activists.

IX. Femininities under militarization

Whereas El Sisi's masculinity promoted an identification with protective and authoritative father/husband roles as "traditionally" Egyptian, femininities were articulated as one (Zaki 2015), supportive of the nation-state for its own ends. Bridesmaids in camouflage dresses and strategically "CC-fied" garments amidst Egyptian flags were pictured at public celebrations, infusing them with patriotism.⁹² El Sisi was present not only at protests and elections but also during festivities, including at expensive and *shaabi* weddings alike. The politicization in Egypt of such important moments of socialization and expressions of gender identity was attached to the heteronormativity and sexualization expressed by nationalist-militarist femininities, crossing women's classes, religious belongings and social statuses. The high visibility of military fashion among women symbolically emphasised that protection and defence had acquired a new place in women's everyday lives: it was incorporated as a structuring component of an "Egyptian woman"'s aspirations, identity, relations, body and habits, in both expressed and unarticulated reactions.

In many respects, the Latin-American *caudillismo* – the phenomenon characterized by strongly authoritarian figures with populist programmes – was also permeated by similar gender dynamics and models, which helped *caudillos* to develop even stronger authoritarianisms (Kampwirth 2010; see also Amar 2011). The coupling of neoliberal economic restructuring with militarism separates Egypt from the radical, anti-neoliberal policies of recent *caudillos* in various regions of Latin America, which are also under the different influence exercised by external governments and geopolitical contexts. From a gendered point of view, *caudillismo* is marked by a strong father-son relationship, which Paul Amar (2011) criticizes as perhaps too easy an explanation for the troubled masculinities in the Middle East. The strong fascination with the sexualized El Sisi-nation relationship as a heterosexual husband-wife bond seems different in its reconciliation of familiar and new images of military nationalism. I suggest that the romantic side of his "irresistibility" for women and the militarization of weddings perhaps had such a wide resonance in coincidence with a marriage crisis (Salem 2016; Singerman 2007), staging the statist fascination on a much larger scale.

⁹² Morsy supporters would use the colour yellow at weddings, and use a four-fingered hand as a symbol of Rabaa (whose pronunciation is similar to the Arabic word for "four").

Women as reproducers of the nation and supporters of the state overlap here with a version of what Enloe (2000) defines as the status of the army wife or mother. Enloe analyses the role of the soldier's wife as a labour of physical and especially emotional support to the army and the military system. At the core, the "good army wife" is caring (Kaplan 1996) and affectively accepting (Enloe 1993) in order to grant success to the military husband and the military system in general. In coupling the army wife with nationalist-militarist love, women in "Egyptian life" were encouraged to join a different political space as participants in nation-building processes. Their role as supporters and caregivers was still required by the President, but in ways that permeated the whole country with domestic feminine management, as demanded by El Sisi himself.⁹³ Domesticity was invested with political meaning and responsibility, at his request. The socialization of the army wife's support and loyalty is functional in preventing the jeopardy of military control in Egypt. Enloe has shown (Enloe 2000) that militarism is always at risk of losing its grip: "Militarizers seem to believe that if women cannot be controlled effectively, men's participation in the militarizing enterprise cannot be guaranteed" (Enloe 2000: 294). This control came affectively, enforced only in part. In this desiring space, "any social project that is not imposed through force alone must be affective in order to be effective" (Mazzarella 2009: 299).

X. Remaking "Egyptian women" and the feminist dilemma

The symbolic measure of El Sisi's political success – from his intervention to his campaign for the constitution and the presidential elections – was the much-advertised public support obtained by a reified notion of "Egyptian women" (Zaki 2015). The complex realities on the ground and various acts of protest showed, however, that visibility and invisibility needed critical enquiry and an understanding of the responsibilities and roles of mediators – as translators (Mehrez 2012; Baker 2016) and leaders (as in Chapter II) – of the context. In 2013 and 2014, cliques of El Sisi-supporting women were mediated as the token of his popularity. In previous protests the indistinguishable mix of the crowd, cutting across all social groups and filled with plain-clothes policemen and thugs (*beltageyya*), brought both danger and exhilaration. Rubbing shoulders with other protestors, but also being attacked as such, made it difficult to separate the nation, civil society and state institutions. The nitpicking over "Egyptian womanhood" and feminine support after 2013 was therefore particularly revealing. As El Sisi filled the scene, Egyptian women were most often homogenized as both patriotic mothers and army wives, both reproducers and supporters of those who, ultimately, would kill other Egyptians to defend the nation. The women who since 2011 had been vocal in large numbers in

⁹³ "Sisi and his women." *Mada Masr*. 25th May 2014. www.madamasr.com/content/sisi-and-his-women. Last access: 4th June 2015.

the streets and squares, demanding their rights and social justice, would now fulfil vocal yet supporting roles: separated from men, but relating to them through their praise, functional for the masculine and militarized centre of power. The fear of a greater authoritarianism, from which Field Marshal El Sisi would liberate Egyptians – a concept repeated from 2013, throughout the 2014 campaign and onwards – was influential in reorienting the political field towards these subjectivities.

The consequent absorption under state feminism of longstanding activists such as the late Shahenda Maklad, and the uncritical support of the National Council for Women (NCW), was underlined by various young Egyptian feminists (Abdel Hameed 2013; Zaki 2015) as an avoidance of political reformist struggle in favour of privileging more conservative identity claims instead (see also Seikaly 2014). On TV, during one of the nights of Ramadan, Maklad praised the army for saving Egypt. The NCW, the governmental body responsible for women's affairs, consistently supported (or did not oppose) military interventions against protestors and the role of security apparatuses during Morsy's mandate.⁹⁴ With the publication of two statements – the first after the attacks against women in June 2014, following El Sisi's declarations,⁹⁵ and the second following the "She and Terrorism"⁹⁶ conference in 2015 – the NCW unapologetically supported first the army and later the President. The horrific sexual violence of June 2014 in Tahrir, which will be discussed in Chapter IV, was described by the NCW as "revenge against Egyptian women to steal their happiness" under the "world's eyes", ignoring previous cases of political violence in the square. To fight terrorist killjoys, the solution for the NCW was to empower women as peace builders, in line with UN Resolution 1325, passed in October 2000, which underlines the importance of the inclusion of women and the mainstreaming of gender in all aspects of resolutions and peace operations. There is no mention of the accountability of the state.

Much in these documents reproduces the same categorization of women, and the same nationalist media rhetoric and selective language of international rights, as is found in official

⁹⁴ See the comments of Dalia Abdel Hameed, Gender Research Officer at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights: National Council for Women: state feminism seeking to contain revolutionary feminism. October 2013. <http://eipr.org/en/blog/dalia-abd-el-hameed/2013/10/national-council-women-state-feminism-seeking-contain-revolutionary>. Last access: 29th August 2015.

⁹⁵ "National women's council says assault is used to discredit women." *Mada Masr*. 10th June 2014. <http://www.madamasr.com/en/2014/06/10/news/u/national-womens-council-says-assault-is-used-to-discredit-women/>. Last access: 29th August 2015.

⁹⁶ See NCW website: <http://www.ncwegypt.com/index.php/en/media-centre/ncw-news/147-ncw-s-stand-with-regards-to-the-current-events-and-issues/1594-speech-by-ambassador-mervat-tallawi-president-of-the-national-council-for-women-before-the-conference-entitled-she-and-terrorism>. Last access: 29th August 2015.

army statements. After the public celebrations in Tahrir Square for newly elected President El Sisi in 2014, one of the women who had been brutally attacked in the square received an unexpected visit by El Sisi at the military hospital where she was in treatment. The President – turning up with other officials, a bouquet of red flowers (like a romantic partner) and several cameras – was shown on national TV channels apologizing to the woman. Promising to give her back her rights, he publicly announced that he would take action against harassment and its roots, much to the public's approval. The victimization of the woman in front of the feminine audience of "all Egyptian women", whom El Sisi addressed, reiterated the masculine and humanitarian protection of the military president, coupled with a safety which, however, was not possible for women to quite own by themselves. Happiness seems elusive for women: it can only be brought to or taken from them; it can be felt only in univocal relation to something else (the nation; masculine protection). Either for raising children properly or for visibly polishing Egypt's image, womanhood is constructed as instrumental. Farida, one of the busiest young feminists I interviewed, who was acquainted with the institutional feminism of the NCW and NGOs, commented bitterly on this point: "With militarism, we kept imagining the hero. Oh, he kicked someone's arse. That's the level of patriotic talks. Of course it is a feminist problem." The problem of heroism mattered for feminism, as it transformed bravery and love into gendered qualities of nationalist-militarist identities, producing different effects for masculinities and femininities.

There is an important reference here to the non-discursive and non-representational effects of the political actions that made it collectively difficult to renounce military intervention: political affects. Nour joked that the moment El Sisi intervened as a rescuer, state feminists and older feminists would act like "big mothers": carrying the duty of "caring" strongly for the military nation-state, as required by their position and role. The "conversions" that she saw seemed to her justifiable by care, and by fear. But younger feminists too, like Sara, a feminist and leftist activist wearing "many hats", gave public interviews in international media supporting the army intervention to depose Morsy on 30th June. Like many, she also saw 30th June as a revolutionary expression of a single popular will, and not as an orchestrated coup. She later changed her position, but at least in the first stages she favoured the military strategy as a safe exit for Egypt from the alternative of the radical Islamists. Emotional relief at the crackdown on the Brotherhood – which fragmented society – was reflected as a public political phenomenon re-enveloping the materiality of bodies in the protests, the commodities of everyday life, and the roadmap traced by the army and Egypt as a whole.

Anti-militarism as a feminist practice carried consequences in Egypt since nationalism rematerialized deep-seated fears and horrors, together with promises of love and gender

fulfilment. Enloe (2000) reminds us that, in contexts where US soldiers are occupiers, if women join male-led nationalist groups and protest against violence towards local women by US soldiers, they risk reinforcing the symbolic feminization of the nation; but if they are vocal about their own forms of domestic patriarchy, they may lose the support of nationalist men and be accused of betraying their nation (Enloe 2000: 96; also Aretxaga 1997). As Nelson highlights, when it is a close part of nationalist identity politics, feminism is often absorbed into male-dominated groups (Nelson 2001).

These conflicts had repercussions all over society, and engendered a major dilemma for feminists among my young interviewees. They felt they were being asked to choose between issues which were experienced holistically and intersectionally. Christina told me she was too confused to have a clear opinion. “They think I am weaker because I am Christian,” she repeated to me: the subordinate position of being a Christian – assessed on a strength scale – while churches were the targets of attacks affected her judgment of the equal protection promised by military and security forces – even though she had had chilling experiences with them which she could not forget. She felt conflicted by the intersectionality of the particular position she inhabited as a Christian woman, especially at the moment when the Islamist government was over and an apparently more neutral figure had taken power, available to protect the Christian minority and prevent religious conflicts. In an article written for the independent news outlet *Mada Masr*, Nubian Muslim feminist Fatma Emam Sakoury also expressed mixed feelings.⁹⁷ While the 2014 constitution granted Nubians a number of unprecedented victories – the historical right to return to their lands, which had been flooded by the dam under Nasser; the recognition of colour and race discrimination; the legal promise of development plans in Nubia – she was hesitant because of its remaining articles concerning military trials for civilians, the absence of rights for religious minorities, and the still-limited women’s rights. She emphasised that these were not the answers to her generation’s struggles. In her words, there was a sense of novelty in the value of familiarity and relationality that young and new feminists had brought to the field, which threw the essentializations of militarist nationalism into stark relief.

This fragmentation among women activists and feminists was interpreted as a retreat to safe positions invested with personal interests and to an identity language of Egyptianness: it was analysed as a passage from politics to performances of identity, as discussed by Sherene Seikaly (2014) and Zaki (2015). Certainly “Egyptianness” became the debated identity

⁹⁷ Fatma Sakoury Emam, “Being Nubian in Egypt and in the constitution.” *Mada Masr*. 23rd December 2013. <http://www.madamasr.com/en/2013/12/23/opinion/society/being-nubian-in-egypt-and-in-the-constitution>. Last access: 9th October 2015.

fulcrum of the political field and military action, as I mentioned in Chapter I. How, though, in the summer of 2013 did nationalist identity performances become more meaningful than revolutionary practices, and how did they structure the political field into gendered hierarchies while excluding uncomfortable truths such as state violence? To interpret the situation as a collapse of politics into identity representations devoid of agency, or as a facade of false consciousness, risks underestimating how 30th June fuelled the resurrection of the state. Rather than only looking at state feminists or the army as discursive or representational actors, I look here at what affects them and the public arena of politics (Aretxaga 1997, 2000), and at what is valued: to understand how, after all, such dilemmas and desires were possible and resisted critiques.

Clinging to the army was not an act of submission. Although abstract and immaterial, it was the result of certain conditions of material, affective and discursive production, in Marxist terms. El Sisi quite carefully never asked for that, asking instead – on 26th July 2013 – to receive the popular mandate to fight terrorism. For many Egyptians, choosing El Sisi was a matter of bread and butter, as it had been to choose Morsy one year before. But also, Egypt as a nation remained untouchable, like a taboo: it would be defended to the death. For many Egyptians, relinking the army with the nation through El Sisi had invaluable political effects. It was not for the national family to structure the military, but for the military to structure the national family and its politics. It had more to do with hope – for the love of the nation; for the defeat of Islamist terror; for El Sisi as the public strong arm of the state – than with cynicism (as in Turkey: see Navaro-Yashin 2002). I suggest therefore that the dilemma between supporting the revolutionary upheaval and carrying on feminist struggles in the context of militarist Egypt helps us to further understand how the military nation-state was heavily leveraging the topographies of the affective experiences I sketched above – not only identities, although attached to identities – to engender its subjects and manipulate the nation-state relationship. This also highlights how young women's groups and feminists were (mostly) differently invested in emotions of love, hope and despair as political affects, and how their difference was at the centre of the dilemma.

XI. Women activists and the failure of love

The promises of inclusive political love translated in Egypt into a gendered hierarchy of relations, violence and subordination. Feminist experiences of women who have participated in nationalist struggles in different contexts (Radcliffe 1996; Yuval-Davis 1997; Mayer 2002) – occupying intersectional positions as fighters, carers, politicians and mothers – have proved this to be a common stage of political transformation. Different nationalist groups in the MENA region (including revolutionary ones) have encouraged women to join struggles for liberation

from a common enemy in postcolonial contexts, and then later excluded feminism from the political spectrum due to anti-modern sentiments and the rise of political Islam (Badran 1996; Hasso 1998; Joseph 1999). Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Egypt are all examples of governments that conceded women's rights on paper while actively destroying independent feminist associations (Joseph 1991; Kandiyoti 1991; Al Ali 2000).

The sidelining that troubled the young Egyptian feminists and women's rights activists I met in Cairo in 2013 was due to a much subtler invitation from the newly coupled military nation-state: it reclaimed femininity as nurturing and women as carriers of tradition – but it did not stop the repression of them at the protests.⁹⁸ The articulation of political love – as family relation, as national heritage and as sexual-romantic bond – invited women into a hierarchy of subordination which fused nationalist revolutionary sentiments with military statism. It reoriented the spaces and bodies of the revolution into different kinds of relations, and valued them differently.

As in the known history of love for the army in Egypt, it did not take long for the political Bluebeard to El Sisi's Prince Charming to appear. Nineteen new prisons were built after the revolution, 16 of them after El Sisi's approval in 2013. Prisons for women grew by almost 50%, from nine to 13, and now constitute 20% of the total number of prisons, that is, 62 (ANHRI Report 2016).⁹⁹ Sixty thousand prisoners – more than half of all prisoners – were political detainees: over 40,000, according to Human Rights Watch, were charged, detained or sentenced between July 2013 and May 2014 (HRW Report 2015). The military nation-state further announced the enlistment of women in a special body of the Egyptian army – beyond their usual clerical roles – and of dedicated taskforces of policewomen to prevent street harassment during Eid festivities. This news was received with great concern by my interviewees, including Dalia AE,¹⁰⁰ in a growing climate of gendered violence, political repression, and horrific revelations about the prisons through the frequent publication of detainees' letters.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ I will discuss this in Chapter IV.

⁹⁹ The number is calculated from the official data available. The report differentiates between four different types of prisons according to the severity of the sentence, and specifies that police stations as well as illegal centres work as detention areas: coupled with the overcrowding of cells, this makes the actual number of "prisons" and prisoners much higher – especially of political prisoners, who officially are more than half of the 106,000 detainees.

¹⁰⁰ Zenab Ataalla, "Un passo in più verso le donne nell'esercito egiziano? Forse sì o forse no." *Noi Donne*. 2nd November 2015. <http://www.noidonne.org/blog.php?ID=06727>. Last access: 6th September 2016.

¹⁰¹ Although it did not become a genre, the process resembles the publication of human rights activists' texts in Morocco. See Slyomovics (2000).

Militarization escalated by productively cultivating femininities at odds with each other, masculinizing violence further while seemingly teasing women. Women could punish and re-educate men by using militarized violence (such as torturing male harassers in public with tasers). At the same time, however, they were deterred from protesting by the new Protest Law, and by the inconsistent policing and random killings. No Women's March was possible in 2016: few groups of women protested in public for their relatives in the prisons. The space conceded to armed violence puts into question how, in the construction of women's roles, "militarization holds out such advantages to some women some of the time" that it has been difficult to "see the maneuvers" and to "detect militarization's fundamentally patriarchal consequences" (Enloe 2000: 298). Although there were some differences, for the young more than anybody else this affective envelopment set constraining and punitive conditions that were unacceptable after January 2011. Farida's view of nationalist love emphasizes the troubling point of the current moment, although it is nothing new: "Well, the love for the army is not new. To me it glues together gender and process of genderation [gendering]. At the end of the day, this is what I think: I always consider that the enemy is our nationalism".

Farida noted that in the dilemma faced by feminism, the worst part was nationalism and not the state. The state had no affective power for her – which is not to say that the state did not affect her experience of subjectification. The challenge, however, lay outside it. The gendered making of nationalist subjectification, which binds love for the army to love for the nation, appears as a known, wearisome calamity that keeps recomposing gender hierarchies behind the harmonious fantasy of national unity. Although nationalist and army love was familiar to her across generations, she was not drawn to that love; the materials that manifested militarized nationalism – the square as the collective nation, the gendered bodies of protestors, the commodities branded El Sisi – appealed to her differently. The mystical and the profane of the nation-state were not "doing" anything to "rebellious activists" like Farida because they failed to recognize their specific suffering. Their relation to the nation-state as a supporter was not valuable enough: there was no appreciation of their other affects, such as pain, or of the relationships of solidarity and acts of heroism which they had especially learnt to value in the square.¹⁰²

The labour of military love, carried on with increasing force and necessarily through women's labour, draws attention to the inherent weakness of the militarist project. In Sara Ahmed's work (2004) on political affects, she argues against the capacity of political love to maintain harmony and unity within society. Ahmed believes that despite its promises, love is ultimately unable to fulfil the desire for equality and unified identity in a society. Love does not make

¹⁰² On this, see Chapter VI.

“good politics”, as it does not challenge existing power relations – as with charitable initiatives and their love for the abject (Ahmed 2004: 141). In Egypt, the love for El Sisi promised to recreate a form of harmony in Egyptian society that had been lost with Morsy. Middle Eastern international actors helped, by granting new financial and material trust to Egypt, and substituting for the temporarily cold relations with the USA and Turkey, which sided with Morsy. Still, the lack of love for the military, even if in a minority, persisted.

XII. Negotiating links: intersectionality as affective mobility

Love and terror could not continue unchanged, as order and disorder were deliberately engendered at the same time. Looking at the affects expressed in relation to militarism, a few activists explicitly told me they were deeply troubled by the militarization of Egypt. In December 2013 Dunya described to me her discomfort at the paternalism she perceived behind the curfew:

I hate this curfew. It makes me feel like I am a teenager, and someone is telling me what to do and when to do it. Patronizing. I did not stay at home all the time; in the evening I go down, and sit outside with my *bawab*'s wife, and we talk in the fresh air. But we need to question this control, as it is part of the right to be yourself in this country and society. Even sad. *Khalas* [stop] with these expectations of happiness.

The experience of the curfew was often maddening. It was a confinement to a timeless boredom, uncertainty, isolation, repetition of everyday routines within domestic spaces, unthinkable possibilities. The safely locked small world of domesticity – inside a larger world supposedly inflamed by violence and divided by weapons – was not at all romantic. As if we were caged prey considered unskilled for nocturnal life, the sensoriality of the surrounding environment was mediated in the evening by videos on TV, texts online, sounds of hunting rifles and helicopters. In the Cairo of endless noise, we were immersed in an uncannily long and silent wait, at times interrupted by protestors beating pots like drums and indecipherable random yells.

For many it was not as unbearable as it was for Shaimaa and me. On the streets many Egyptians took photographs next to tanks, bonding over the common love of the army: the enthusiasm was palpable. I was told by an acquaintance that the curfew was actually for the benefit of Egypt's productivity – the *istiqrar* of Mubarak's political language (Makram Ebeid 2012) – as it would give unruly Egyptians a neat schedule. Shaimaa's “rebellious” affects – from hate to sadness – contrasted with the celebratory and supportive emotions and acts expected of her as a woman. Patronizing control and the imposed schedule of everyday life were broken through the precious feminine intimacy of sharing time and chats with her doorman's wife, in the quiet of the night. The right to sadness and the defiance of the curfew are enacted by

sharing idle time in the forbidden outdoor space – with another complicit woman, the guardian of the building. In the enjoyable and long-awaited breeze of summer evenings in Cairo, her experience underlines intersectionality as a way of reaching affective “negative space”. Surrounding the objects/subjects of nationalist love and terror, there was a space, an environment still partly undisclosed by the management of political affects. Intersectionality in Dunya’s words is the possibility of stretching this “negative” affective space which surrounds objects/subjects, waiting to be explored; to tie it to other meaningful affective relations – to sadness; to pleasure, rather than happiness – that redraw subjectivities and objects within them, as in Dunya’s apartment life. These relations politically and socially renegotiate subjectivities and the environment where they are lived.

Intersectionality – as a way of making evident and negotiating gendered affective links which would otherwise remain unexplored – helps us to understand the censorship of artist Nadine Hammam and her “Tank Girl” at Art Dubai.¹⁰³ The piece, later shown in Cairo in 2012, was rejected on the basis of being “too phallic”, rather than for her military critique: the nude of a woman - a reminder, with her red bra, of the “Blu Bra Girl”¹⁰⁴ - sits on a phallic pink tank shooting rats to represent the subversion of patriarchal power. Similar reflections also came from Nour and Rami. The two times I met Nour, who was involved in a leftist political party, she always directed our conversation to the army. Her paranoia that her words would be used against her if not anonymized set the tone of our meetings. When talking of the army, she constantly referred to their opacity and ability to co-opt. Describing the army’s economic interests to me in great detail – in comparison with the Muslim Brotherhood’s activities in the commercial sector – and the way it corrupted or punished those who criticized them, she depicted a situation of obscure and competing social control (between Islamists and the army) that had endured since her years at as a university student. For her, the discourse was about competing with patriarchy and fighting fear:

You know, all these discussions on the *ikhwan*, the military... most NGOs ignore that Egypt is used to clean money and to make money, and this is part of the picture. And they mostly focus on gender in terms of getting quota in the party: to challenge the army, a quota. But the reality is that in all of us there is fear of improper behaviour... meaning fear for our sexual life, but also for the rest, which is considered improper. These are the spaces that we need to invade, the spaces we reclaim from the state... And when it comes to women doing it by bargaining and compromising for rights in the constitutions, it is always risky to give in to the Muslim Brothers or to the army: women have no power in their groups. Why should they [women] please them, then? But the same happens among socialists. It happens because there is a deep patriarchal

¹⁰³ Rowan El Shimi, “‘Tank Girl’ challenges military rule, patriarchal society.” *Ahram Online*. 9th March 2012. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsPrint/36357.aspx>. Last access: 6th September 2016.

¹⁰⁴ See on this Chapter V.

problem in both. The question we live now, of sovereignty, is the same; it is a consequence of postcoloniality... well, at least we have a country [she laughs]. But what we need is more collaborative patterns and calculations among us activists, as everything is connected.

Nour focused first on the Foucauldian internalization of “fascism” and the fear of “behaving improperly”, before moving on to the patriarchal obstacles women often face within the state, the army, Islamist groups and leftist parties. Maryam’s comment complemented Nour’s point: “It is easier to attack now the army and the police on a gender perspective and talk of violence from there. But the revolution showed it is much deeper: it is about authority.” The negative space of authority – surrounding the object of the military nation-state – was framed by El Sisi as a consequence of love and masculinity. Instead, Nour and Maryam highlighted its centrality in relation to patriarchy and the fear felt about “improper behaviour”.

Collaborative connections, based on a common refusal of patriarchy and authoritarianism anywhere, including in political parties (as underlined by Kandiyoti 2014), seem to be the lens through which to look at the feminist dilemma. Affects move and mobilize. But acting together and coalescing as feminists against militarism, while still working in postcolonial Egypt and dealing with its militarized institutions, was an option that required time and effort. Whereas many activists mostly took positions as individuals, or waited before reacting, the massacre at Rabaa in August 2013 was officially denounced by 10 human rights groups, among them Nazra¹⁰⁵ as the only feminist initiative (although later joined by El Nadeem). The collaboration of longstanding Egyptian feminist and academic Hoda El Sadda in the 2014 Constitutional Committee of 50, and the influence of some women’s organizations and feminists, helped in part to shape articles on women’s rights, such as Article 11/2014 on violence inside the militarized nation-state (El Sadda 2015).¹⁰⁶

A parallel call for connections also came from Rami, one of the few male activists I was able to meet, a self-declared feminist:

Because of my job, I see so much pain. After a while, atrocities are not shocking any more. You realize they are everywhere. El Nadeem has documented so many of them. What hits me is the stigmatization of survivors. Here, it is all about family relations; family relations matter. And that’s why activists are “home breakers” [for Egypt]... Yet against militarism we need many more people. How to connect them to the normalization of violence? We need to discuss on both militarism and Islamists, not one side only. We need to discuss on masculinity, to question how is it to be a man... To get out of the activist circles, and to talk not only to activists. So little work is

¹⁰⁵ ECESR, “Egyptian human rights organizations on dispersing Rabaa sit ins.” 14th August 2013. <http://ecsr.org/en/2013/08/14/egyptian-human-rights-organizations-on-dispersing-rabaa-al-adawiya-al-nahda-sit-ins>. Last access: 10 October 2015.

¹⁰⁶ Activism against gender-based violence led to the possibility of a large feminist cohesion, as I will show in Chapters IV and V.

interconnected; and I am appalled that there are still people who talk of activism but for instance dismiss the whole Palestinian question, or Nubians. I wish there was more intersectional thinking, I wish! But what I see is that although there is the potential, occupation discourses are losing the ground, in this moment, and so are the discussions spaces.

Rami's view reflects his experience in the field of refugees, working for an organization which applied standard and somewhat mechanical procedures to prove, collect and denounce domestic abuses. For Rami, this "objectivity" and standardization of the process explained the inability to offer deeper or more complex explanations for the normalization of violence, and the everyday of pain he lived in his life and job. His insistence on connections and "making links" – by focusing on contemporary hypercolonial settings – constructs intersectionality itself as part of activism's affective resistance to authoritarianism. Opening multiple discussions and connections on troubling or silenced subjects such as masculinities and occupation, as part of the fight for rights under militarism, was for Rami the way to go. It is not possible to fight militarism alone, as it refashions itself behind other faces – like the overlapping faces of the Egyptian presidents on the walls of Cairo. Perhaps the fact that the most prominent group against the role of militarism in civil society, "No Military Trials", founded in December 2011, does not consider itself a feminist group (although some of its members share feminist views) is an indication of the difficulty of filling in the missing links in Egypt, and of the unappealing nature of "feminist" affects compared with the romance of love and terror.

Rami conceptualized another form of linking that defined women activists as the nation's disappointment. These were activists who were not martyrs, and not quite supporters. They threatened the life of military nationalism and statism if they were not co-opted. Their affects exposed the instability of the militarist project: the non-totalizing reality behind the fantasy of love and terror. Like Ahmed's killjoys (Ahmed 2004), they ruined the harmony of nationalist unity: by not falling in love, they cultivated the aspiration to intersectionality as an affective circulation. Feminist groups and women activists' "fault" – as shown by continuous and unpredictable arrests, kidnappings, murders and injuries – was to keep the affective space beyond love and terror open, often making enormous personal sacrifices in the circulation of other affects, habits and embodiments. Through this circulation, they highlighted and contested the hegemonic oppression that linked the army to the nation-state – collectively strategizing, as well as reminding us of, other relationships and environments where political subjects and objects could exist in Egypt. The struggle against authoritarianism and violence found in Tahrir and on the streets a political environment where these affective feminist remnants – not without contradictions – constituted the material to build other relations with the nation-state, and formed gendered subjectivities.

XIII. Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on the centrality of political affects in Egypt in the summer of 2013 and its aftermath. Through an examination of the figure of Field Marshal El Sisi in particular, I have explored the gendered politics of romantic-nationalist love in association with the terror of the Muslim Brotherhood. Both necropolitics (Mbembe 2003) – the power to decide who can be disposed of – and biopolitics (Foucault 2008) – the power to let live and to manage lives – in Egypt during this time required a philopolitics, that is, an affective management of politics, not entirely imposed through force.

Gendered affects infused discourses and representation of El Sisi's "masculine mystique" and presidential genealogy as a romantic hero and national saviour. The emotional weakness of his political opponents was weighed against his controlled masculinity (as argued by Makram-Ebeid 2012) and his compassionate but strong attitude (Ghannam 2013). I have suggested in this chapter that these characteristics of "real masculinity", locally appreciated in Egypt, also circulated through commodities which helped to accommodate femininities and masculinities differently in the shared political field. In the already-established market of nationalist identities, the choice of "nationalist-militarist" fashion and other creative paraphernalia – designed for men's and women's use at home and during celebrations such as weddings, marches and birthdays – shifted sexual difference into desirable political roles.

Post-revolutionary social and political gendered subjectivities and orders emerged, supportive of the state and violence, of its order and disorder: women's labour slid from the struggle of protest to the "supportive" army wife and mother (Enloe 2000) who visibly embodies her love through (also) her taste. Feminist analyses have astutely shown how consumerism (at least in part) and identity performances become an apolitical pursuit that replaces the quest for women's rights and social justice, especially for women (Seikaly 2014; Zaki Chakravarti 2014; Zaki 2015). In this chapter, however, I have interpreted this substitution as a sliding of affects, translated into the gendered politics of militarism and the affective labour of supporting the army – as army wives, women soldiers, and victims in need of paternalist protection.

The emphasis on terror and love re-established sovereignty within the government, in order to reinforce the position of the army and to justify or conceal gendered state violence. The affective repository of the revolutionary protests was affectively co-opted as part of a history of commonality between the army and the nation. Through this affective excess (Aretxaga 2000; Navaro-Yashin 2003), nationalist fantasies of social harmony revived the desire for the state as a military fantasy of family (and familiar) relations. In constructing military history as nationalist

history, the Egyptian state – critically wounded by the revolution – was revived as hierarchically dominating the nation.

The gendered economy of affects – which produced the masculine leadership and the “marriage” of nationalism and militarism as an icon for gender relationships – also positioned women activists and feminists as killjoys. The dilemma for many young feminists I met lay in their inability to compromise with the marriage of state feminism and militarism: they attributed this partly to their generational difference, partly to the intersectional (such as racial and religious) positions they occupied as female subjects in Egypt, and partly to the fragmented activist ground. If young feminists are especially stigmatized or invisibilized as non-viable subjects in the militarized process of nation-state making under El Sisi, how will the patriarchal structure of nations (and militarism) be significantly altered over time? With the increasing militarization and maddening oppression, the final sections of this chapter have tried to highlight how affects enter into feminist and women’s rights strategies in tackling relations with the nation-state. As my subjects underlined, intersectionality was also an affective practice and a political aspiration that became vital for survival. The attempt to open more connections between groups and struggles may pass through affective strategies that “unfix” hegemonic affects – such as love and terror – and look for the other possibilities (or affective spaces) surrounding the same objects in the political and cultural field. Although love with terror has been manipulated to support violence and colonization, it can also be the propeller of action and social change (Ahmed 2004). In Egypt, where laws are trampled by the state and security institutions, and where affects are politically exploited to support a situation of disorderly order, a feminist intersectional approach to the management of affect seems to be strategic – both to co-ordinate different groups by linking struggles, and to question authoritarianism and gender relations within the nation and the family, in ways that may open different paths to defiance and change.

CHAPTER IV

THE HEART OF CAIRO BEATS HARD: POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND GENDER TRANSGRESSION IN TAHRIR SQUARE

I. Introduction

Nobody believes me when I say that I have never felt safer than when I was in the middle of the Square... Even during the clashes. No, especially during the clashes! We would sit in the garden in the middle of the square, and suddenly hear someone on a microphone: "Guys, we want 500 volunteers in Talaat Harb because there is a bus full of thugs." I've never found people reacting with so much calm. One would say: "I am going as yesterday I was too tired to help". Another one will say "ok, I will finish my tea and catch up with you". A third one would say "Ok, goodbye, in case I go home while you are gone". It all felt so normal... (Tahrir Monologues 2012)

One by one, on a black stage with minimal props in Downtown Cairo, stories of Tahrir Square are brought to life again, performed for a tiny audience of eager listeners in autumn 2012.¹⁰⁷ Instead of the Corniche Al Nil and the dusty roads where traffic pulses incoherently from the square through the hot and noisy veins of the city, the set shows black-and-white posters that mix protesters' faces with the logo of Kentucky Fried Chicken, a branch of which stands at the corner of Tahrir. The anonymous monologues try to present a tapestry of the voices and experiences of young people who joined (or did not join) the protests in Tahrir. As performances based on oral histories, they blur the boundaries between theatre and history, promising to be exercises in memory and self-reflection, a year and a half on from the revolution. The monologues are acts, in the sense in which Diana Taylor (1997) studied performances in Argentina during the Dirty Wars of the dictatorships: corporeal movements that take place in a space where bodies touch, and also performing gestures – an affective passage, an opening for a political fantasy. They are acts of survival in the obscurity of the present, for the artists and for the audience. The stage and the square mirror each other.

The young woman's voice that opens this chapter, in one of the eight monologues spoken by a female voice,¹⁰⁸ describes her sense of safety during the protests. While most monologues are narrated by men – focusing on political violence, military attacks, imprisonment or the failure

¹⁰⁷ Directed and staged for the first time in 2012, since 2013 the monologues have been available online, on a dedicated YouTube channel. The stories, collected by *Tahrir Monologues* participants, are directed by Sondos Shabayek, who has also collaborated for the past few years on the Bussy project.

¹⁰⁸ Women's performances focused on different themes: apathy (such as in the realisation that "I did not go down," or in regret at not joining the revolution – "I feel guilty"); the long march to the Presidential Palace, another important site of protest, describing the differences between protestors of all beliefs and orientations, and plainclothes agents' tactics to prove their credibility ("they will tell you, I was with the revolution since the first moment"); being confused with a dead protester because of having the same given name and a similar surname.

to protect their family – the calm safety in the storm of Tahrir conveyed by the woman's monologue is different.¹⁰⁹ Safety develops in her words not because of the protection of men, but because of her contribution to the protests as a woman, friend and comrade. This experience, staged in the theatre, resonates with the experiences of many of the young feminists and activists I met. Rather than the blood ties running beneath army suits and protestors' t-shirts, her experience speaks of other shared affective political grounds on which ties can be built as well as destroyed. In the words I recorded from Habiba: "You cannot be the same after Tahrir... after such an experience. Sharing your space, your tent... speaking to one another with people from all walks of life, the *salafi* guy, the other women, next to each other... it is life-changing." Tahrir became a unique predicament for those who joined its protests. It gave a complex existential quality to the historical experience of upheaval, reorienting lives towards different objects and desires in a dramatic manner.

The intimate, epic story of safety flickers with hope amidst the horrific stories of violence in Tahrir, which started circulating widely in everyday life and in the media after January 2011: the square became an epicentre of political violence against women. Safety became the paramount concern in the square. The barricades, blocks, checkpoints with tanks, the sudden closures of the square and of strategic points in the city centre, visibly expressed anxiety over the untameable protests, and tried to make the political space inhospitable and inaccessible to the crowd. The image of sexually violated women, and of mob of thugs (*beltageeya*), usually on the payroll of the police, was used by various representatives of the Morsy government, the army and religious clerics to delegitimize popular dissent. Yet the criminalization of protests and the changes to the technologies of repression were far from being spontaneous or sudden.

Mob sexual assaults as part of state and police violence against women protesters had already been documented. The first case happened on 25th May 2005 during the Egyptian Constitutional Referendum, so-called Black Wednesday¹¹⁰ (Kirolos 2013). Fayza, a young

¹⁰⁹ Sondos Shabayek actually presented monologues about women on the square only, but she kept this separate from *Tahrir Monologues* because of "too much feminine energy for males". See the Q&A session following the keynote speeches on the Arab world, "Storytelling to resist and remember", in August 2012 at the 9th Women Playwrights International Conference in Stockholm. See: "Tahrir Monologues Woman Playwrights International Conference (Q & A)". YouTube video, 14:17. Posted by TahrirMonologues. 20th August 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9qGAQGgtkQ>. Last access: 8th September 2015.

¹¹⁰ A video documents the assault. Women were assaulted while men were beaten by a number of men who had arrived by bus at the protest site, all under the eyes of an indifferent police. https://archive.org/details/black_wed_protest_cairo. See also: "Egypt: calls for reforms met with brutality." *Human Rights News*. 26th May 2005.

member of Women and Memory, who willingly changed her career direction to work with the organization, remembers it as follows:

The state initiated this whole violence against women. It's a fact. It was back to 2005, and the event, the Black Wednesday on the 25th May, it was actually troops of the police force: they were in civil clothes, and they actually started to harass the women, they took off their clothes, they stripped them. They even prevent the others from saving them or trying to give a hand. It was the first time to see state violence against women. And now it is a fact, an escalation.

After 11th February 2011 the assaults grew in number and intensity. Virginity tests, systematic sexual assaults on women during anti-government protests, and physical abuses during International Women's Day (El Nadeem et al. 2013; FIDH et al. 2014; Nazra 2014¹¹¹) cast the square and the women's bodies as part of a well-defined ritual of escalating sexual violence.¹¹²

The sexualization of political violence, and the sexual politics in Tahrir after 2011, drives this chapter. It will develop through the analysis of four personal narratives of women activists, and of the various technologies of control they faced: in the square, among organizations of rescuers, in the family, and in the public arena. As suggested by the mirroring relationship between Tahrir and the monologues, acts of sexual violence both inflict physical and psychological pain and point towards what Begona Aretxaga calls "a fantasy of sexual violence" of the state (Aretxaga 2005: 110). Sexual political violence is used not only to discipline and dominate bodies, but also to tame and engender political subjectivities – in the intimacy of a field of bodies – by reaffirming what the power of the state is intrinsically capable of and what it relies on for control: the violent feminization of the nation. The acts of women protestors that structure this chapter constitute a competing ritual: they articulate acts of social change that establish or disrupt a certain order, and constitute an often painful ritual in which personal stories and acts challenge military-patriarchal relationships of domination.

<http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2005/05/26/egypt11036.htm>. Last access: 4th October 2015.

¹¹¹ "The mob-sexual assaults and gang rapes in Tahrir Square during the celebrations of the inauguration of the new Egyptian president is sufficient proof for the inefficiency of the recent legal amendments to combat these crimes." *Nazra*. 9th June 2014. <http://nazra.org/en/2014/06/mob-sexual-assaults-and-gang-rapes-tahrir-square-duringcelebrations-inauguration-new>. Last access: 8th September 2015.

¹¹² In this chapter I focus on sexual political violence separately from street harassment, which I explore in the next chapter. See also Tadros (2013b).

II. From utopian square to circle of hell

The absence or rarity of sexual harassment characterized Tahrir Square during the 18 days of continuous protests¹¹³ in January and February 2011. The social agreement on this exceptionality made it the “safe place” of the monologue (Ezbawy 2012) and the utopian place of Egypt’s revolutionary hopes – although not necessarily non-violent. In less than a month, this situation was overturned: the following years would see sexual violence used against demonstrators in a history of horror.

The Million March for International Women’s Day, organized for 8th March 2011 in Tahrir, was the first step in the post-revolutionary attacks. There was a much smaller turnout than had been expected, and there was some disappointment among participants, as the momentum gained by the revolution less than a month before had led many to hope for a higher number. Women were brutally attacked by groups of men, some of whom were chanting “*el shaab yurid isqat el sittat*” (“the people want the fall of the women”), a dark play on the revolutionary chant against the regime (Davies 2011). On 9th March, several female demonstrators were sexually harassed and violated by men who forced their hands into their underwear (Tadros 2013b).

The arrest and detention for four days of at least 17 women protesters in Tahrir was followed by virginity tests on at least nine of them, conducted by the military (EIPR 2013). Various generals of the ruling SCAF, including El Sisi, the head of military intelligence, justified the tests as protection for the military against rape accusations¹¹⁴ and as a “normal” routine practice in women’s prisons.¹¹⁵ The test also included being forced to undress, undergoing a strip-search by a female guard, being photographed naked by male guards, and receiving electroshocks, blows, and threats of prostitution charges (Amnesty International 2012a). The absurd paradox of the military virginity tests – which sexually violated the female protesters in order to prove that the guards had not raped them – was an accusation against the women in the square. Degradation was proof of their immorality as much as it was proof of military irreproachability.

¹¹³ The CBS journalist Lara Logan was assaulted and raped on the final day of protest. The hypervisibility of her case is discussed by Paul Amar (2011b) as a way to frame the uncontrollable Arab crowd. Dupuy (2011) described similar patterns of discrediting protest, and also of controlling women, in sexual harassment and rape within Occupy Wall Street.

¹¹⁴ Abdel Rahman Hussein, “Egyptian Army Doctor cleared over ‘virginity tests’ on women activists”. *The Guardian*, 11th March 2012. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/11/egypt-doctor-cleared-virginity-tests>. Last access: 8th September 2015.

¹¹⁵ “Egypt: military impunity for violence against women”. Human Rights Watch. 7th April 2012. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/04/07/egypt-military-impunity-violence-against-women>. Last access: 8th September 2015.

The virginity tests opened a new *modus operandi* in the technologies of control of the state over women protesters, although they were already current in practices of detention and torture, together with other practices of sexual violence. Although women's bodies were not displayed to the general public (but were to male military doctors, and to female and male officers), as would happen in the years to come, sexual violence started being used to assert power, to extract a "confession" from a female political opponent, and to permanently mark her socially. As noted by Scott Long (2004: 121–122) in his examination of the medical history of homosexuality in contemporary Egypt, virginity tests were carried out in public hospitals until a few decades ago to determine whether a bride was worth her dowry, and therefore to classify women who were unmarried but not virgins as prostitutes. One of the young women, Samira Ibrahim, filed the first-ever legal suit against the military doctor that had conducted the tests. One year later he was acquitted by the military court, on minor charges; the existence of virginity tests was denied¹¹⁶.

After the sit-in against the SCAF organized on 8th July 2011, the attacks on women became regular at every protest, and grew in gravity. November saw the first attempts to strategize and speak out about the violence in the square, with no success (Langohr 2013). On 16th December 2011, during a heavy attack on a group of protesters against the SCAF who were camping in Tahrir Square, video footage recorded the assault of an unnamed girl dressed in a black *abaya* (the conservative long robe): she was kicked to the ground, dragged, unveiled, beaten with sticks, and had her torso stripped by six military police officers. The assault on the girl – dubbed *el sitt el banat* (the lady of the girls, an Egyptian compliment meaning the best of girls) or Blu Bra Girl (because of the colour of her underwear) – was not further investigated, and was barely commented on by members of the SCAF such as Marshal Tantawi. However, the attack resulted in one of the largest participations in a women-led protest, under the banner "*banat masr khat ahmar*" ("Egyptian women are a red line") (Kirolos 2016; Langohr 2013; Tadros 2013b; Hafez 2014), which later became the name of a group monitoring the situation in the square during protests.

¹¹⁶ Several street art pieces celebrated Samira's courage and defiance, and the horror of the assault to the Blu Bra Girl. In a famous piece, Samira's head was stencilled above several stencilled military guards and a tank. The main "Blu Bra Girl" graffiti in Mohamed Mahmoud Street - showed the moment the girl was attacked by three guards, represented as devils. Artist and academic Bahia Shehab designed a series of blu bras stencils, calligraphic stencils of "Blu Bra: no to stripping" and calligraphic stencils of "Long live a peaceful revolution" in the form of a footprint, which were sprayed in many Cairo locations in 2012. See: Nama Khalil, "Blue Bra Graffiti (Bahia Shehab)". *Design and Violence*. <http://designandviolence.moma.org/blue-bra-graffiti-bahia-shehab>. 3rd September 2014. Last access: 8th September 2015.

New attacks against female demonstrators and journalists in March and then June 2012 made Tahrir a scene of horror and dread. On 8th June, when a large protest was called (El Deeb 2012), 19 organizations demanded respect for female protesters' dignity (Langohr 2013). The demand went unheard (McRobie 2014). While the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi groups had apparently encouraged previous attacks on women protestors, they were explicitly accused of sending thugs in November 2012 (when cases of rape occurred in Tahrir) and December 2012 at the Presidential Palace (Tadros 2013b). Sexual assaults in these circumstances involved men as well as women, including women who were dressed in ways that made them pass as men (Tadros 2013c): both were stripped and molested with fingers and objects in their genital areas and rectums (Langohr 2013). In November 2012 two groups formed to intervene in the square before, during and after attacks on women: Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment (OPAntiSH) and Tahrir Bodyguards. Their interventions relied on volunteer teams who received calls to hotlines, rescued survivors and collected their accounts, redirecting them to medical and legal services (Kirolos 2013; Langohr 2013). Other groups that usually focused on sexual harassment in the streets, such as Shoft Taharrush/I Saw Harassment, intervened in the square as well.

With the anniversary of the revolution on 25th January 2013, and 19 cases of sexual assault recorded by OpAntiSH, it became evident that there were patterns of sexual violence which overwhelmingly targeted female demonstrators in Tahrir. Groups would surround women in impenetrable circles – defined as the “circle of hell” (FIDH et al. 2014: 11; El-Tamami 2013) – and would use sharp objects to injure genitals, harm and possibly kill, as testified in most horrendous cases (El Nadeem et al. 2013). Over 200 cases were documented between November 2012 and August 2013, of which 186 took place between 28th June and 7th July alone (Kirolos 2013). On 8th June 2014, during celebrations of the election of President El Sisi, new cases brought the total to 500 survivors between February 2011 and January 2014 (Marroushi 2015)¹¹⁷. The organized and extensive sexual assaults in the square made the utopian revolutionary place of Tahrir into something painful.

III. Excessive violence and technologies of control: the “public prison”

There was a systematic excess, a paradox of arbitrary violence, in these well-planned technologies of control. The circles of hell were systematically made inaccessible from the outside, making it very difficult for those in the crowded square to rescue survivors or to understand what was happening inside the circle. The circle would often enclose, strip and assault the rescuers as well. Survivors reported being told that everything was fine and not to

¹¹⁷ Many more may have gone undocumented.

worry, at the very moment they were being raped with objects, their clothes torn to pieces; others were laughed at, insulted and threatened with death. When someone tried to free Malika – whose story is narrated in this chapter – the assaulters said she had a bomb. The traumatic excess and cruel enjoyment of these acts were visibly institutionalized in the virginity tests and other routines that preventively criminalized women's bodies. As a SCAF member commented, the women assaulted in the square were not like "our daughters"; he also added that they slept with weapons, in mixed-sex tents. The heightened fantasy of terror produced in Tahrir was fed with a disturbing mix of sexual and psychological humiliations for women, which at times relied on well-known fears of terrorist violence.

The assaults extended the torture techniques used in prisons, and the excesses of punishment during protests, to Tahrir Square, the physical public arena of all Cairenes. Although there were no barricades, the circles created areas of punishment – like cells – inside the square. In Foucault's analysis of punishment in pre- and post-revolutionary France, the public dimension of punishment represents a degree of torture intrinsic to the penalty, part of a spectacle "of the scaffold" (Foucault 2009: 33–34). Public torture "must produce, open for all to see, the truth of the crime" (Foucault 2009: 35). The suffering of the body and its space of punishment produce the subject's immorality.

The specific type of violence and the subjects addressed give indications of what power configuration we are looking at as well. The role of the police, like that of the army sketched in the previous chapter, has been pervasive in Egypt since Mubarak (Ismail 2012, 2015; Kandil 2012), forming a true "police government" (Ismail 2015). In both the security services and the detention centres, the police acted in visibly repressive ways on the streets, where contestations were formed among street sellers, other protesters, etc. against the regime. The transformation of Egyptian state violence into mass sexual violence in the square, particularly against women, configured a form of "public prison" led by the security apparatuses. The extension of detention and policing techniques to the square located sexuality within the current technology of control as a tool of humiliation and discouragement. The punishment of the bodies of female and male protesters engendered their morality as institutionally criminal and visibly deserving of that punishment.

IV. Secrecy and suspicion in the square

The immorality of protesters, particularly female protesters, was a response to accusations levelled at the "mimetic figures" of the security forces: suspicious figures who were not what they appeared and who mingled with the demonstrators and in the streets, ready to attack. The figure of the *beltagy* (thug) paid by the police to attack fellow Egyptians and tourists often

leveraged the same ambiguity that surrounded the figure of the “spy” (most often a foreigner¹¹⁸) and the much more dangerous figure of the plain-clothes policeman. Thugs could be standing near any of us, perfectly mimetic, in daily situations – but more dangerously during protests. If Mubarak’s secret police, who famously could arrest people in a café for even a single comment against the President, were considered a thing of the past after 2011, the danger re-emerged at protests in the suspicion that every bystander might be harbouring an insidious, secret plan of punishment.

Mimetic violence acquired a very personal meaning for demonstrators, those who “willingly enter the circles, the Square” (El-Tamami 2013): attire seemed to matter. The clothing suggested in a manual for protesting in Tahrir, which included suggestions about how to respond to police attacks and defend oneself, recommended wearing a hoodie jacket and casual outfit in order to move fast: it seemed to be gender-neutral apparel, similar to that worn by Black Bloc groups in 2013. As Grosz wrote, however, any neutral universal body is actually a male body (Grosz 1994). The only women shown in the manual were not wearing the hoodie, and were smiling with a policeman¹¹⁹: the body of the clashing protester was a masculine one¹²⁰.

Once one was in the square or its vicinity, it became evident that no hoodie or running shoes would help either male or female bodies. Crossing crowded areas, let alone crossing them fast, was impossible. The concentration of bodies in the field was such that when the demonstrators were walking across the bridge to reach Tahrir Square from Zamalek, the pavement would tremble under their weight. Protests needed to have an immeasurable trust, almost a kind of faith, in the touchable proximity of strangers. I felt often somewhat ashamed of my need to go to Tahrir with a group or a male companion – even if I enjoyed sharing those historic moments, filled with chants, laughter and celebrations, with people I knew. The enormous creativity of women protesters made me ashamed of my caution. The incredible variety of femininities, joyous at being there and willing to enter a place that could suddenly turn against them, was undefeatable. Whether the women were alone or in small groups, the colourful variety of their clothes, make-up and high heels gave me an extraordinary sense of hope. It lifted my fear of the police and thugs standing behind their identical shields and helmets, or camouflaged among us.

¹¹⁸ “Egypt pulls TV ads warning foreigners may be spies after ‘xenophobia’ fears.” *Al Arabiya*. 10th June 2012. <https://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/06/10/219777.html>. Last access: 6th September 2016.

¹¹⁹ In the manual this seems implicitly to be a tactic to confound the police, represented as an enemy elsewhere in the manual.

¹²⁰ Source: <https://info.publicintelligence.net/EgyptianRevolutionManual.pdf>. Last access: 15th January 2015. The manual was copied and adapted during the Ukraine protests in 2013.

The vulnerability of bodies, and the fear of permanent mutilation, extreme pain and death, saturated the square with ambiguity. According to Erving Goffman's work (1959) on the presentation of the self, achieving the sense of "sincerity" is the main purpose of our social interactions. The plain-clothes thug, hired by the police to attack other protestors, intentionally hides the sincerity of his actions, following an institutional mandate. As a criminal employed by the police for repressive purposes, the thug is a hybrid assemblage of what Goffman considers the opposite extremes of social performance in real life: the con artist (who has no belief in the act, but is believable) and the military officer (who has the greatest belief in her role). The protests were produced as a blurred mix of sincere and insincere demonstrators, of hidden motives and political truth, of violence and morality; "true protesters" therefore felt forced to offer justifications. Fayza's words about what happened on the final day in the square in February 2011, when harassers were particularly attacking girls and women, makes this point clearer:

There was this young guy, and he offered me water and a sandwich, he really insisted – I told him, "*Wallahi* [I swear], I don't want anything, but please go ahead and ask other people here if they want it." Another man touched my elbow, by accident... They both apologized and both told me they were not harassing me, verbally or physically; they did not mean to. And I did believe them. They were so worried.

The terror spread by the possibility of thugs pushes the two men to justify their actions as sincere and not flirtatious.¹²¹ Both men's actions might have seemed intrusive of Rania's personal space: they touched her body, they offered food and water more than once, beyond what might be considered politeness. Yet their apologies, and their worries about genuine masculinity, define the presence of social anxiety regarding a gendered "authenticity" that is both political and moral. The excess of justifications defined the "normality" of protests as charged with ambiguity, encroached upon by the figure of the thug.

Since the 1990s, the infiltration of protests by such figures, which were previously categorized as terrorists by the police, had created what Paul Amar calls the "*baltagi* effect" (Amar 2011b: 308). This effect had the double function of spreading terror among the protestors and offering international media and security agencies a convenient colonial-Orientalist picture of the protestors as hypersexualized, uncontrolled, working-class, Muslim men who inhabited the "Arab streets". Hence protestors were transformed into "hypervisible, but utterly unrecognizable, mobs" (Amar 2011b: 308). Amar links the metaphors of the Arab streets with diverging strategies of women's groups – such as El Nadeem and the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights – regarding the criminalization of masculine violence.

¹²¹ On flirtation and harassment, see Chapter V.

The attention paid to the sexual violence of protesters-thugs concealed the legitimacy of and reasons for the protests, as Amar suggests: it did so for an audience outside Egypt, and for many who attended the protests. The metaphors of the Arab street were actively produced in the ways the thugs were imagined by upper-class female participants in self-defence courses in Cairo, depicting them with the characteristics of lower-class men (Lachenal 2014). Nevertheless, Amar does not ask how mob sexual violence became the preferred form of humiliation and injury inflicted on men and (especially) women in the mass protests after 2011, in numbers that required the spontaneous participation of assaulters; or how mob sexual violence affected women and men differently (see Aretxaga 1997).

As a source of social anxiety, the undisclosed identities and intentions of thugs and harassers were instrumental in allowing institutions to implicitly suggest that – during riots as well as severe attacks by the police and army – what was seen (celebrations and demands for social justice) was not what it appeared to be. Deeper truths could be brought to the surface by acts of violence. Violence simultaneously offered proof of both the crime and the rule of law. The regime was thus configured as working routinely through unpredictable, excessive violence. Excess betrays the “irrational” pulse behind the technology of control and repression: “a fantasy of sexual violence” (Aretxaga 2005: 110) supports the apparent control of disciplinary interventions.

V. Credible female protestors and the truth of violence

The construction of male protestors as uncontrolled thugs (and thus as not credible, politically or socially) is linked to the construction of female protestors as indecent women, thus concealing their political contributions. Comments from religious authorities and women representatives of the Muslim Sisterhood, together with official statements by the army, emphasised that the protests were morally indecent. The honour language used replicated the legal structure of the state in enforcing and protecting women’s decency (*’ird*) (Baron 2005: 15) through the penal code. No article until the 2014 constitution punished mob assaults, non-vaginal rape, rape with objects, or other forms of sexual violence such as marital rape.¹²² Sexual violence is approached on the basis of the woman’s lack of consent to intercourse or sexual contact (Articles 267, 268 and 269). The definition of assaults as “honour violations” (*hatk ’ird*) reinforces the stigma on women’s morality and discourages the filing of lawsuits against perpetrators (FIDH et al. 2014: 19) – a discouragement further reinforced when the perpetrators are state figures (Tadros 2013b).

¹²² See: “Laws against sexual harassment in Egypt.” *Harassmap*. <http://harassmap.org/en/resource-center/laws-against-sexual-harassment-in-egypt>. Last access: 4th October 2016.

The reprehensible moral conduct of female protesters was “proven” publicly by the severity and horror of their punishment. Sexual violence and assaults during political participation made female protestors not only immoral but also “suspicious”, to the demonstrators in the square and to the country. Their experiences were not believed at first, perhaps because the truth about sexual assaults and grave injuries – with all their horror – would taint and devalue the social and political demands of the square. The violation of many women in the square and in encounters with police and military officers threw into question the limits of the gender articulation that made Tahrir so magnetic and so terrible.

The “regulatory” and exclusionary aspects of the morality and ambiguity of protest were constantly negotiated and produced by young women activists, who shifted between understandings of their own bodies as individual, social and political. The indecency of the body of the female protestor *because* it had been assaulted was raised in particular by Malika in the examples she shared. She described an initial contradiction when she spoke on TV in early 2013 about the sexual assault she had survived a few months before in the square:

It was a great call to [action]... It supported me because I was afraid how the people would react. [...] I believed that I am not wrong... even if this is the tradition, it is wrong. And we make a revolution... we have to apply ourselves, this is the revolution; you cannot just chant and go home, not just go with the flow. It is a big problem: people in the square, they chant and hold signs and ask for freedom and justice and and and... and they don't apply [that] on their neighbours and families, they judge them, they are not honest with them, they don't apply it on the weakest people in their life... even if they are ready to die in the square!

Malika was a survivor. In Tahrir her clothes were torn, she was dragged and pulled along the ground, tortured and sexually assaulted with knives and objects, threatened with malicious remarks and laughter. “My body has changed... I am happy it changed, its composition, everything... I want to keep it this way.” In the quote, she connects her personal dignity to the revolutionary dignity demanded in the square, and to everyday acts of justice. The respectability and integrity of her body seem to her to have been hypocritically detached from the heroism of wannabe martyrs: those who would sacrifice their own lives but would not support her and her wounds; those who would not apply disruptive revolutionary force to social conventions and inequalities. Her terrible account of what she experienced during the protests looks passionately at the core of the revolution, and at what she felt to be a personal, social and political betrayal simultaneously:

The first case [of violence I know of] was on 11th February 2011. But it kept happening in the square all these years. But after the constitution in November 2012 until July 2013 actually, there is something that happens very obviously – raping with knives. Cutting [a woman's] clothes [is something], but using knives inside her... it is not harassment, it is violence. It is different, and the quantity [of assaults] was a lot and

the violence was much more... this tells it was organized as I believe they [the institutions] know what is happening in the square, which was closed for three months... [...]. It is also organized because... we were assaulted in the clashes with the security forces. This is not a normal situation. How could [the assaulters] give their back to the security forces, and not fear that they would be shot; how could they feel secure since it was full of teargas... you cannot see and breathe, and you are harassing a woman? And not just touching, but [he would be] staying there for one hour. It is not normal. [...] I had at the beginning a big confidence that they would save me, the people in the square. But they did not just save me. They did participate. I had a hope, that someone would come and rescue me. But then I lost the hope. "I am fed up, finish" [I thought]. Later on, [with the people] denying and ignoring, I felt it was a betrayal. Nobody helped me in the square and nobody helped me later. Everybody [else who] was injured, arrested, beaten, tortured... they did take their rights, but their rights have [also] been asked for. Why not for us? We were brutally assaulted, why is this ok with you?

Malika refers to the ways mob sexual violence was supported and organized in the square by institutions, and how it was used institutionally to arbitrarily close Tahrir Square to public access: in this policing and punitive short circuit, the excess of state violence justified counter-revolutionary measures of urban control. Intervention groups such as OpAntiSH and Tahrir Bodyguards, as well as the decisions of groups monitoring sexual harassment in the streets to extend their activities to Tahrir, were formed almost immediately after her case, when sexual violence in the square escalated in gravity, intensity and scale. The violent assaults on women during the protests in the square between 2012 and 2013 peaked at hundreds of cases, arguably including other participants beside state agents. The double complicity of the participants in the sexual violence and the incredulous deniers in the square and later makes Yasmine's cry for help rather than protection even more disturbing. Amal, a survivor and OpAntiSH volunteer in Tahrir in 2012, explained:

I once had to give a word at a conference at AUC, for academics basically. It was about sexual violence. And there were people before me that were very academic, they were reading their papers, and it was very different from what I was going to say because I am the complete opposite of it. I was very... not disappointed but shocked at how detached what they were saying was from the streets. They are still talking of the "power of saying no". What?! [She laughs.] You can say no all you want, but that's always the fight we have to have, that we have to mention every time we speak about harassment and oppression with sexual harassment; because oppression started in Tahrir to try to protect, to try to save the women who get assaulted... and the condition is that they participate in a political activity. Yes, to a certain extent it is politicized, and sexual violence is one of the means of the authority to inhibit people and to scare people from participating in political activities. Towards women is more obvious, but there are rapes in prisons to male and females. [Sexual violence] has always been a tool of the authority. It is organized in a certain way. But let's assume that the state decide to send men to assault women. How many are they going to send? Fifty men? Two hundred men? These all they have to do is to trigger the assaults and they are relying on the fact that there are 2,000 men who are ready to commit the rape. And this is the thing we keep on saying. We cannot exonerate the society from

this responsibility, as the authority would not go away with it if the society was not ready to accept such a crime.

The “complicity of the square” with the authority that the protesters seek to challenge is described by Amal and Malika in various modulations. It hides in taking a protective approach to female bodies; in justifying the assaults, without taking up a position; in joining the assaults; in denying that violence happened at all. Opposition to violence does not come from violated subjects, for Amal: it is not an individual act of resistance, located in an individual body. Without any collective condemnation of authoritarian political violence or of the use of sexual violence as a generalised technology of social control, she does not see the point of the fight. By humiliating and attempting to silence protesters with coercive bodily techniques used in prison, this complicity in sexual assault reinforces women’s social and political oppression, feminizes the nation and the square, and criminalizes the women assaulted by adopting the legal and moral language of honour.

Exposing oneself beyond “saying no” was a difficult pursuit, as Malika described:

I wrote¹²³ my testimony one week later [after the assaults] and I noticed that the 70 per cent of the people [who commented]... they did not believe it. I put it on Facebook on 1st December, on my friend M’s space. I tried to write and I could not. I called him on phone and even at this point it is easier to speak than to write. My initials only he wrote, and that I am his personal friend. He tagged many people from human rights organizations, and [the post] was shared hundreds of times. People said it was to scare, no way this happened, to say that people in the square did that, like in the 18 days [the media] would claim that people had sex and took drugs, they are thugs and spies... Also people I know in person, they write [this]... It hurt to know that all this happened to you, they saw you getting assaulted; and when you go on FB the friends that are all in the square, it was [like] anything happened. And this crime that happened to me, nobody mentioned it. If a guy was beaten from five guys they would talk about it, it is not right; but hundreds of people saw me, and it was ok. Maybe for my sake, they think. And people were taking photos and videos of me, I was scared to find them but I searched for them like crazy, because everyone did nothing... And I felt that with my silence I contribute to these crimes to continue.

Malika presents a picture of denial motivated by moral issues concerning both her status as a woman and the status of the square, doubly dismissing her experience. She was denied the credibility a man would be granted in a similar situation, and she was criminalized in the same category as the familiar figures of ambiguity – spies and thugs. She was also denied dignity in her body, revealing the female body as a site of moral stigma and social silence about sexuality and sexual violence: she should not have spoken, for her own good in society. The birth of the genre of the testimonial of violence formalized these accounts as particular narratives with

¹²³ As she mentions immediately after, she did not write about her experience herself. Here Yasmine is referring to the moment her story was first written about by her friend M, who posted it on Facebook.

references to political and social meanings (see Feldman 1991; Malkki 1995). As Amal commented: “Many of us appeared on TV because at the time it was a sensational topic: ‘rape in the square’. They all wanted to interview the victims... but we are not supermarkets and we don’t give info on the assaulted. It is not an order to McDonalds.” Social media and Egyptian TV programmes helped to disseminate personal stories of sexual assault in the square (Langohr 2014) and increased their credibility, on the side of both the rescuers (such as with posts on OpAntiSH’s Facebook page) and the assaulted (as for Yasmine).

Malika – like the men and women that presented their stories of sexual violence during protests and in prisons – expanded on what Susan Slyomovics (2005) calls “performances of human rights”. Slyomovics uses this term to classify the written production of Moroccan human rights activists about torture, prison and violence. Within the wide application of the term performance, such writings are “performances” in that they try to portray the unspeakable under a state which violently attacks its own citizens. Performances of human rights take, and give, physical and cultural space in the public arena to discuss prison and torture – “difficult information and knowledge” (Slyomovics 2005: 2).

Slyomovics’s focus is on writing. In Egypt, writing about difficult personal knowledge was impossible for activists such as Malika and Amal. Years later, Malika still could not write about it – she could only speak about it. Others drew the assault they were subjected to. Credibility was built through various means, both verbal and non-verbal: articles on mob sexual violence written by activist survivors and volunteers went alongside street art, pictures, TV interviews and social media posts. Did these public visual acts of identification and belonging compete with the dominant spectacles of terror of the state, police and army? As Diana Taylor (2004) writes of the Argentinian dictatorship, the disappearances of human beings and civil society went hand in hand as the military junta applied a public spectacle of terror and feminized society through media, newspapers and films. The mothers of the *desaparecidos* set up their own public acts in response, in Plaza de Mayo, the main square of Buenos Aires. Yasmine’s credibility was challenged, by both the activist community and the larger audience in the public arena. The circuit of credibility passed through another – at times potentially exploitative – economy of acts of visibility and knowledge, as Amal underlines. Sexual violence against women protestors in Cairo had in fact been made public for the majority of the population through traditional and online media, particularly to prove women’s indecent conduct. As the trauma of violence blocked the possibility of personal writing for some women survivors, leaving them distressed, emotional forms emerged to express and mediate unspeakable facets of violence and to legitimize experiences of assault. Public visibility, in various forms, was crucial for feminist activists to publicly fracture the moral doubts over

women's honour, to disrupt the social stigma and silencing of sexual violence, and to restore the personal and political "truth" of the square.

VI. Feminine modesty and activism

The opening to the public arena of the stigmatized topic of sexual violence was a considerable discursive shift for feminist and women's rights activists. Activists contested the notion of moral shame and the political recognition of sexual violence that were encapsulated by the social and cultural embodiment of "female modesty" (Antoun 1968; Hoffman-Ladd 1987; Abu-Lughod 1986) – covering body parts, being shy with men – and that generally implied that the female body could be dangerously shameful if not controlled. The choice to publicly expose sexual violence in the square both widened the discourse on political violence and challenged the formation of social morality and personal identities.

Activists' double contestation of the modesty and credibility of the most visible women survivors became crucial for keeping the political and moral identity of women's participation together. Samira Ibrahim's comment on the acquittal of the medical doctor who performed the virginity tests – "No one stained my honour, it was Egypt's honour to be stained"¹²⁴ – used the word *sharaf* for honour instead of *'ird*. *Sharaf* includes *'ird*, as it represents wider social dignity (of a family, of a tribe) and is not exclusive to women's chastity and sexuality like *'ird* (Abou-Zeid 1966). Samira's political use of the word highlights a refusal either to use the feminine-blaming language of rape or to pursue a battle for her individual moral identity alone. Her struggle cannot be dissociated from sexual politics in Egypt. Activist, survivor and researcher Noha Roushdy (2013) underlines how the Blu Bra Girl was caught in a similar dichotomy. She was adopted as the symbol of the bodily integrity of Egyptian women, the "red line" for political violence. Yet at the same time she was widely criticized in mass media for wearing a coloured undergarment which was insufficiently modest and did not meet the moral standard implied by her *abaya* (Roushdy 2013; also Hafez 2014b: 25–26).

Roushdy, the first woman in Egypt to successfully sue her street harasser,¹²⁵ contends that the most recent scholarly understandings of female modesty in Muslim contexts – in particular, by Mahmood (2005) – do not help us to understand what modesty is for women activists in Egypt. In Mahmood's view, female modesty as part of moral agency is a set of embodiments enabled by and within the relations of domination in a given context, rather than by resistance to those historical relations. Taking a position similar to Mahmood's, but drawing inspiration from

¹²⁴ Samira Ibrahim. Twitter post. 11th March 2012. <https://twitter.com/Samiralbrahim4/status/178806672184197121>. Last access: 10th October 2016.

¹²⁵ I will write about her case in Chapter V.

Kandiyoti's conceptualization of the "patriarchal bargain" (Kandiyoti 1988) to elaborate on the Blu Bra Girl, Hafez (2014b) comments that Egyptian women carved out visible spaces for protest and resistance by demonstrating "their allegiance to the values of nationalism and patriarchy: engaging in pious activities, exhibiting the virtues of loyal citizenry, and portraying the familiar trope of mothers of the nation" (Hafez 2014b: 24). She gives the example of the march that followed the assault of the Blu Bra Girl, under the banner "Egypt's daughters are the red line." The march not only "reclaimed revolutionary women as Egypt's daughters" and "restored the honor" of the women assaulted, according to Hafez (2014b: 26), but also affected the masculinity of the men who protected the women protestors from assaults. The march helped "to redress the imbalance created within the patriarchal system that in principle should uphold the protection of females by males" (Hafez 2014b: 26).

Hafez's view is grounded in the understanding of, rather than in a challenge to, local gender relations. Resort to the Egyptian daughter/mother/bride lexicon was also a constant in several protests against sexual violence – both political and non-political – which I attended. The humiliation was shifted from the assaulted women to the perpetrators, reversing the dynamic of power. Domestic relations and affects could take back the political space of safety. In giving a familiar connotation to the relationship between assaulted and perpetrator – which sexual violence had transformed into an unnamed, vulnerable body and an inhuman dominator – the language of kinship, however, repositioned womanhood and manhood into a known asymmetry of the nationalist, patriarchal hierarchy. The sexual politics of violence remained hidden, and so did the connections between morality, modesty and politics. What about the men assaulted (see also Roushdy 2013)? What about female and male bodies?

Roushdy suggests that upholding modesty in conformity with existing relations works within the "regulatory idea" of women's behaviour: the repetition over time of gender acts and bodily attitudes, to naturalize them (Butler 1990: 33). As Roushdy asks, what happens to the modesty and agency of women and men who challenge established relations of domination by default, and who thus directly challenge patriarchy? The focus on the visibility of modesty and its processes of "restoration" more generally displaces body politics as a symbolic, moral practice, dissociating it from immediate material suffering and the political, militarist structures that shape it. In concluding that men and women protesting in accordance with nationalist discourses of morality "upheld the patriarchal bargain in order to obligate the military to act honorably" (Hafez 2014b: 27; also Hafez 2012, 2014a) and "transformed the state's metaphors of control into battle cries of resistance and dissent" (Hafez 2014b: 26), Hafez's analysis rests at the level of symbolic, moral relations of belonging to the nation. The problem is that the state and security apparatuses did not stop at the level of metaphors and

moral symbols of control. Both male and female protesters in the square were feminized and injured by male attackers who assumed a position of heterosexual, militarized domination. Control operated as a sexual technology on the body, with a differential effect based on sexuality rather than gender differences. This is reflected well in Malika's strategy during her first TV interview:

We found that by going on another channel [I would have been] watched by more people, and I went with that TV host. He worked on the national TV and he always helps people... He is very critical and clever and they know he is not just about the revolution; and he is a man. So he is old, a father to me, and this would work to get the impact we wanted to get [for credibility with the audience]. [...] On Friday he called me that there is another survivor and she was with her husband. This was amazing because we have samples of society: a girl and a married woman and her husband... when a family watch they will see themselves in this example.

Malika describes how she planned to make herself heard. She understood how the experience and popularity of the TV host, coupled with his role as a reassuring and wise "father figure", would create a replica of a small Egyptian family in the studio. In this spectacle of (apparent) familiarity, her purpose was not to reinstate herself as an Egyptian daughter subjected to the authority of her parents. Through the familiar identifications of the audience, she and the other woman would at the same time upset the supposed comfort of the "family hierarchy": she was an unaccompanied woman; the husband was beside, not before, his wife. They would all be speaking in detail about the sexual assaults in the square in a manner which was unprecedented. She would assert the credibility that she had been denied in the first place by making explicit her violation and the complicity of the police and the square. She continued:

My case is about dignity, is about torture, killing, is about Khaled Said: the matter that the police did not respect. They insult them [the protesters], they treat them like animals. People should contend this right, demand for it, not to cooperate [with the institutions]. It does not make any sense to give up on dignity and then calling for it [during the protests]. For me... I would not dare to go back [to the square] and ask for my dignity and freedom and social justice without doing anything for myself, when something like this happened to me.

Restoring modesty and honour through gender relations and moral obligations tackled only part of the fantasy of control that buttressed the violence of the state, police and army. Sexual violence was political: the violation of the body left a mark that implicated the entire country, as Samira Ibrahim underlined. The personal story Malika told on TV, and that she still tells, did not separate the demands made in the square from her own demands as a sexual being. For Yasmine, speaking out and returning to the square was not simply a matter of re-entering society as an honourable member. The political violence of sexual assault made her and Amal, like many other young activists and feminists, link the various fields of struggle. Her dignity did not lie in her "intact" body. It lay in denouncing the abuses in detail and demanding the

recognition of her bodily and psychological pain, her vulnerability, the collective right to lead a dignified life in her country. While deliberately appearing through the conventional moral tropes of the respectful family, she also turned the tables by denouncing the patriarchal acts of sexual politics.

VII. Defiance and family ties

The moral obligations of kinship, and the chastity and honour of protestors, translated for many women activists into a concealment of the disruptive political and personal meanings of their experiences. It was therefore not surprising to learn that it was often in the household that women activists experienced complicity with the institutions. The perceived family authority over women was expressed in denying them permission to participate in marches and protests. Fayza describes her first time in Tahrir, during the second week of protests:

Even if I was prevented from going down, I went down with a friend who took photos to document [what was happening]. I went down with him and I made sure my brother would be here. I could not take my car. I said to my mother, I am fed up to stay at home, and I will visit my friend two blocks from here. I live not on the main street and had to walk a long time to take a cab. We met in the square with my friend. I was really brave at that point, as... streets were like jungle, the rumours you hear, no police, then we were keeping hearing gunshots, and you don't know what is happening... I don't know what are they doing, if they are shooting real thugs... And when I was in the cab, the driver kept asking, "What are you doing? Why do you put yourself in such danger?" But in my mind this is history making, history is happening right now. If my children one day ask me what did you do, I cannot say I stayed at home. I needed to know by myself, to participate. [Until then] it was hearing stories, stories about how great it is, the people... and I wanted to know more. He stopped in Adly Street and I had to take a minibus or another ride. Another driver took me in Tahrir and I entered the square by myself. Of course it was amazing! I feel blessed I really went there, and that I defied my brother, my mother... I went there because it is a lifetime experience. Especially the atmosphere and the spirit that was in Tahrir in the 18 days. It was once of a lifetime. I never felt the same. The square itself has never been the same.

Fayza expresses her joyful sense of defiance through her long, almost epic, night-time journey to the mythical place of Tahrir. As in the journey of a legendary hero, she had to overcome obstacles at every step before reaching her destination. The journey starts with a lie to her immediate family members, who exercise authority over her based on family ties. After leaving home, she moves through the danger and instability of the city which is roaring with protests and clashes. Her story is consistent with the widespread feeling of chaos and lack of protection I heard in many accounts of the early days of the revolution. She is constantly discouraged until she reaches the place "where history was being made" amid the threat of violence. The magnetic force of the square subverted the expectations she had to fulfil as a young woman and daughter, walking alone in Cairo at night. That experience pushed forward her engagement and her identity as a political protestor, making her decide to join a feminist

group. But a few months later she received a painful reminder of the importance of the discourse of morality and safety for her political participation:

I went to Maspero, and I lied to my mother. There was a protest in Tahrir, for the martyrs. We moved from there to Maspero in a big march. One of my relatives saw me, and told my aunt – but I denied. We stood in front of Maspero, it was 10–11 pm and I decided I would go back [home]. But I could not find my keys. My brother was not at home, so I had to call my mother, who has no car... She came to me at 11.30/12 pm. Especially in winter in Egypt it is kind of late at that time. She had a big fight with me on the minibus, that she would tell my brother, that I cannot do this... Everyone was watching us having that fight. She was sad and she told me things like, good girls don't go to Tahrir Square... you see, Samira [her brother's fiancée] does not go! She kept telling me, you have bad friends, bad circles... I told her, you are making me feel as if I was a whore and I was arrested. And she told me, this is worse. She really respects what I am doing, and actually sometimes she tells me, do whatever you want as long as you enjoy it, but that night, that was a problem for her, to be put in that situation. I did understand but it is not a compromise I can do.

The moralization of activism did not affect only Arab males (Amar 2011) but also interfered with female protestors' family relations, articulating differently the way politics and sexuality merged. Rania's political engagement and identity, like that of many other young feminists and women activists I met – and like the young martyr Sally Zohran¹²⁶ (Ambrust 2013) – was a cause for concern for her family in ways which were often not negotiable and were therefore defied in secrecy. The public fight on the minibus, under the disapproving gaze of the other passengers on the way to Moqattam, became a spectacle. Fayza's mother affirmed her authority to demand an explanation for that night journey, and to prevent her daughter from going to the protests again: but in order to do that, she put Fayza's intentions, friendships, body and morality in question. Fayza's resolution not to let go of her political subjectivity, not to "compromise" on her choice, came with a price: her mother accorded her a worse status than a sex worker (criminalized in Egypt); her political stance produced her as sexually excessive. Rania was ultimately reconciled with her mother.

Malika also faced intense family stigma and personal terror before telling her story on a widely watched Egyptian TV programme. Thanks to an accidental misunderstanding, her full name appeared on screen, despite her father's request. They agreed later, however, that it happened for the best. Her deepest fear concerned not only the moral considerations of her gender identity and relations as a daughter and female member of her family, but also the possibilities associated with her future as a woman in Egypt. She feared the "tarnishing" of her reproductive value and her aspiration to start her own family as a morally reputable upper-middle-class woman in a country where marriage is a major validation of adult life (Hoodfar

¹²⁶ After Sally Zohran died, her parents denied that she had fallen from her balcony while joining the protests. This denial concealed both that their daughter had participated in the protests, which was stigmatized, and also that she had not obeyed their requests.

1997; Singerman and Ibrahim 2001; Singerman 2007). Malika spoke about overcoming her fears:

I was just expecting they would call me prostitute. My father was afraid as well, and he told me I would lose my reputation, nobody would marry me and the family name would be dirty. But if someone else raised our cause, I would never make it. It made a big difference in my confidence, I have changed after this Friday on TV. I became someone else. I heard an applause inside myself. I was preparing myself to be attacked: the first insult a person wrote on YouTube was that I was a whore, that I was breaking the traditions to publicize something wrong, a big mistake... and I felt, for a second, I was again: what did I bring to myself? I ruined myself.... Then I thought, don't panic. We knew. Later on, hundreds and thousands of praises and respect, you are a hero. You remind us of manhood and dignity... I was really shocked. I knew that our network would defend me, but I never expected the opposite. The bigger question in my mind after the first days people shared my pics... I thought, why was I afraid to talk, if people are now honouring it?

By denouncing her sexual assault in public, without sparing any details, Malika shifted her identity as well as her self-presentation. After her TV interview, she felt transformed. Exposing her wounds also had an effect on her audience regarding gender roles, and gained her unexpected and warm support. The profound sense of discomfort and insecurity that the policing and moralization of political violence in the square can create cannot be understood without taking into account the gender expectations it calls into question, as exemplified by another comment by Yasmine:

Once I came back from the TV programme, people apologized with me, they felt different. They could not listen my story on TV, even if they knew it. They felt, the males, like cowards. And I was very happy and I said and thanked them for not doing anything, because they forced me to do something for myself.

Only after hearing Yasmine's story on TV did her male friends reportedly feel like "cowards" – which complemented her role in "reminding [them of] manhood" in her earlier quote. The recovery of masculinity in Malika's words resonates with the "injured masculinities" (Ismail 2006) of young marginalized men in the Boulak area of Cairo, and with the "humiliated masculinity" of the workers of Mahalla (Duboc 2013), who lost their power as breadwinners and in the factory. She stung them with an affective loss: not a loss of their employability and economic capabilities, but a personal loss of the affective capacity of "real manhood",¹²⁷ of feeling and acting with courage and fighting injustice (see Ghannam 2013). Yet Malika's comment also emphasises that her story did not restore a previous condition of gender relations; it did not fulfil a feminine "caring" role that supported masculine recovery and the return to patriarchy. Even if filled with doubt, she did not want to restore any regulatory idea of modesty. Malika used the sexualized discourse on her honour to defy the gender regulatory

¹²⁷ On this, see Chapter III.

circuits of modesty and victimhood. The unexpected and warm support confirmed that the transformation she felt in her identity and body was the transformation she wanted to pursue in her activist relations and spaces.

VIII. Queering the space of protest

Although Fayza had not experienced the same level of sexual violence, the family stigma that she and Malika shared was similar: they both “brought it upon themselves” by occupying a space – a square – with other protesters. If the virginity tests produced women protesters as promiscuous, the space they occupied determined their enactment of indecency and intrusion. Space was reconfigured as neither private nor public, negotiated – albeit ambiguously, as in the case of the thugs – by the gender roles and sexualities of those who inhabited it.

One of Amal’s most recurrent words during our meeting was “space”. It made me think of how, in the drawing she made after her assault, the whole space was occupied by human figures, rendering even more disturbing the sense of suffocation and doom of the figure in red in the middle. Amal explained to me that the violence targeting women in political spaces was also about the way space was constructed:

The way society and culture, the state, looks at women, [at] the size they want women to occupy... the same ideas of women’s carriage in the metro. It is not only that it is up to 10 pm, it is also that out of 15 carriages you have two carriages for women. This is how space is enough for women to occupy. And if she rides in the mixed carriages and someone harasses her, you get the automatic response, why do you complain? You took that carriage.

For Amal, the limited space given to women is calculated as a size within which female bodies can choreograph their movements and labour, both in the square and in everyday life. Stepping outside the allotted space represents a gendered transgression that is punished. Conflict between bodies in a space which is gendered and sexualized – reproducing the patriarchy of the state – is blamed on the transgression of the assaulted. This is not to say that every activist and protester was in the areas of the city where protests happened. But the spaces of the square and of the many sites where protests and contestations happened in Cairo, and in Egypt at large, mattered because political violence rendered them unfamiliar and unhomely, especially for women protesters. Manal, a feminist entrepreneur and activist who ran events for activists, noted the rearrangement of political engagement in line with gender differences, even though during the 18 days it was praised for allowing for a “queer” space of labour and movement:

I started with the revolution in 2011. I just went outside where everybody is going, and that was the square. [...] Everybody was there, not thinking anything but the revolution. More than sexual harassment, it is about having women doing everything

in the square like guys. No certain rules, no differences, everybody was doing everything... [...] Then coalitions and groups started being formed; and here was the problem. You had people representing the groups in the square... and none of them is a woman. Where are the women representing the square? [...] You go to these big meetings, 300–400 men, and the women inside, they are taking notes. Who are you, they asked me. I am part of everything that is happening, it is not just for you guys, who did this... In the square it was not like that. Thank you for helping us in the square, but now you start sitting at home. It is making me crazy! But I was not there to help you! Everybody is helping each other to come out of the situation.

Manal noted how space made gender roles, estranging Tahrir and its political significance from many women protesters. Her disappointment and anger were palpable in her story. Tahrir was becoming a lost opportunity. The return to the usual roles in the reproductive labour of women overturned the political and social engagement in the square that had given many a sense of camaraderie and a hope for change. Rania adds more about “working like guys” with a girlfriend during the protests in Mohamed Mahmoud Street, near the AUC campus, at a later stage of the protests in 2011:

They were collecting medications, and I would try to get in the stuff to spray on eyes and pumps to mix bottles with water and shake it, as much as we could [to help people who were affected by teargas]. There was a car at Opera [a metro station in Zamalek, across the bridge from Tahrir Square], which was a long walk. We volunteered. They told us, can you girls go there? The walk will kill you and the stuff is heavy... you have to go the whole bridge. From Tahrir. It was a long walk, we went there and it was very heavy. And on our way back taxi drivers would offer us drives to get us in. But Tahrir was blocked, and we said it was just a matter of minutes. But everyone was trying to help with whatever they could do. The girls carrying medications and heavy stuff, I kept hearing the comments, look at those young girls, and also young boys... they are too young for that.

At the protests, a gender-neutral division of labour was allowed and encouraged. Both Fayza and Safa, a very engaged young Egyptian activist and one of the core founders of OpAntiSH, were proud of having performed at the protests with a large drum: they incited the chants with rhythmic beats, with their bodies, in a leading role and carrying a weight that was usually assigned to a man. The rhythms of daily life at the protests followed a similar gender pattern in the structure of daily duties, as I was still able to observe during 2012 and 2013. Next to the street sellers and revolutionary paraphernalia, men and women alike were similarly engaged in distributing food, checking the security of the entrances, cleaning, arranging the space in Tahrir, leading people in chants, handing out leaflets, drumming, chanting and documenting. Queer groups and Islamists were also present in the square, enjoying participation in the struggle both as volunteers and as protesters, as shared in the various accounts of Amal, Aliaa and Farida.

In Manal’s story, the space-making of gender transgression, to which Fayza and Amal also referred, was only temporary. It seemed to be a slippage due to the revolutionary state of

emergency. In her story, the women who were taking notes were feminizing the “domesticity” of political reproductive labour, sitting at the back of the political institutions. Their space erased a more visible political identity. Manal, who was severely beaten during the march on International Women’s Day in 2011, told me she was shocked that her attackers kept repeating “Why are you here?” It was not her place; it was not her nation or national struggle. The anger and wounded masculinity Manal saw – “they had this feeling that [women] take their job and in a way their masculinity... that we took ‘their’ place” – gave Manal the idea of founding a coalition for revolutionary women, a political space on their own terms.

Taking elsewhere the experience of “gender transgression” (Duboc 2013) that the square allowed, and of “queering” other spaces with a similar gender-neutral division of daily chores, became difficult – especially when other women opposed it. Manal had a poignant example:

There was one woman with a girl, and they were fighting like hell... When they took us, she started telling me, no, no, what are we doing here? And I told her – she was really an activist, I mean, she was going there every day, [she has] a daughter, she is a housewife, very active... not you out of all these people. You did better than 100 men. She had the courage to fight the SCAF and now you tell me this is not our place? She told me actually we are made to take care of the kitchen, food, house... not you, not you! You are fighting while many guys are sitting! She was thinking she was just helping them, it is her job. We did that for them. [...] There was a big fight until five in the morning. I did not see a guy with her, I only saw her and her young daughter, shouting at this big soldier...

The physical violence of the SCAF, and the fear the woman felt, instilled a radical self-doubt: the space where the woman had threatened and defied the oppressive regime reappeared as fraught with gendered meanings and affects that called her back to her moral duty and maternal identity in her legitimate space – home. The Tahrir which had been familiar became permeated with estrangement by the consciousness of her transgression. She retreated to carrying Egypt, as in artist Kaizer’s mural, after being at the centre of its revolts (Magdy 2012).



"Ladies of Ladies." Keizer. 2014.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Source: Photo courtesy of Keizer.
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/keizerstreetart/11730174076>. Last access: 5th December 2015.

IX. Protecting, defending, rescuing: gender dynamics and intervention groups

Questions about the gendered labour of the protests were a special concern for rescue groups, and in particular for OpAntiSH. Tahrir Bodyguards and OpAntiSH adopted uniforms – identical for men and women volunteers – to facilitate recognition. There were no strictly visible gender differences between the bodies of the volunteers: at the beginning, however, teams of rescuers were exclusively masculine for Tahrir Bodyguards (see also Langohr 2013), while they were always mixed for OpAntiSH. While OpAntiSH was a feminist revolutionary intervention group, Tahrir Bodyguards (as well as the I Saw Harassment group, which started volunteering at protests) gravitated towards a position which combined a charity approach to volunteering with a protective, paternalist interpretation of their role.

Beside the ubiquitous self-defence courses for mainly upper-class women in Cairo (Lachenal 2014; Galàn 2016), some members of these initiatives suggested carrying weapons, knives, harmful objects and even sewing needles (for I Saw Harassment) to reinforce a sense of confidence based on the possibility of harming the attacker. Violent self-defence and protection threw into question feminist tactics that focused on the bodily and psychological integrity of (especially) female protesters during sexual assaults at protests, without reinforcing the patriarchal dynamic of masculine saviours/feminine victims or the moral blaming of female demonstrators. While no mob assaulters were injured to my knowledge, and there were mixed opinions about using violence to respond to sexual violence among women activists and feminists, armed self-defence was often discussed as an individual decision or suggestion. However, during a protest on 7th February 2013, armed self-defence and violent feminine menace found cultural legitimization in a march against sexual assault and the control and exclusion of women from public spaces of protest. Led by the image of Umm Kulthoum brandishing a knife, several women showed their knives, imitating the picture, while yelling that patience was over (a line from an Umm Kulthoum song) and threatening to cut the hands of the harassers and assaulters. Women's bodies were turned into reactive spaces that reflected the fear of death and harm back onto the masculine assaulters. This controversial form of self-defence, as intentionally harmful, grounded the individuals' alternative to the rescuers' protective approach in a cultural icon. Amal clarifies better (and with a Freudian lapsus) what characterized OpAntiSH:

The work of other groups working on law is not what we want to do. It is not our job. NGOs please do this, go and beat the shit out of the government for proper rules. We are not advocates. I think that OpAntiSH is physical interference. At protest. We are like the gang. We are like the army... no, not the army. The gang. And for women... holding on to their space, in itself, is something, and try to empower women to do so.

OpAntiSH members, unlike the other two groups, were involved in documentary collectives such as Mosireen, or were employed at human rights organizations. Because of their position in the field, OpAntiSH members did not promote advocacy, leaving it to already-operating NGOs and groups such as Nazra and EIPR, with whom they collaborated. They did “physical interference”: they interfered both with the space-making of gender and with the sexual politics of punishment. Amal’s slippage about the army is meaningful here, as military-style protective defence had become a popular and masculine way to patrol neighbourhoods (Mossallam 2011). During June 2013, in the already highly militarized and inaccessible Zamalek, I encountered at night groups of men who, armed with sticks, bars and weapons which evidently had been kept well hidden at home for a long time (or bought in one of the couple of dedicated stores on the island), were forming groups of “guardians”. Some of them, equipped with a Facebook page that later took a more general direction of care for the island, substituted for but also helped (in a way that was perhaps even more dangerous) the police and the army. The consequences of such patrols were already visible in 2011, as Fayza recalls:

[During January 2011] in Moqattam as well... you get noises and gunshots at night, and the police station was burnt on 28th January. And we heard all night. From Saturday the mosque spread papers in order to call for young males to go and form a youth patrol, to stay up all night long, to protecting the buildings while people are inside, preventing thugs... as the police disappeared. So they stopped anyone and checked on anyone, their IDs. It was terrible, as anyone was inspected, and if they don’t like the looks they take them, and they deliver them to the police or the army forces in the streets elsewhere. This initiated the military trials, as many of these guardian youth collaborated with the army.

The perceived ubiquity of urban guerrillas and the sense of social danger, even in areas of Cairo which were untouched by protests, may explain why many young and adult men started patrol groups to “protect” their neighbourhoods – both in 2011 and during the curfew in 2013. Young men acting “as if” they were the police, scrutinizing fellow citizens in search of crime, aspired to manhood through “protective” masculine control over the area. As a matter of principle, OpAntiSH rejects the idea of protection during assaults (see also Langhor 2014). Violence in the square is approached in this way, according to Amal:

The way that [they] organized attacks... it would happen from certain times to certain times, and it was very suspicious. In November 2012, this was the first nightmare... not only the cases were so severe, but two of the cases were very close to our circles. So we started... we called H (an EIPR member). Let’s do something. Ok, we still don’t know what to do, and because we all know each other, who are the crazy people who are willing to do this and so... we started. And it was ridiculous because we could not see each other. We wore a white t-shirt and a red slogan. And we developed from there. Based on trial and error. Our part is to physically be there and to rescue the women. it was all improvised and very chaotic, and we started developing more tactics and dividing ourselves into groups, and groups creating tactics for how they should

enter and steps they would follow up, how to understand if she is in a safe space... It is by building up experience. But you really don't want to learn.

Although constantly being forced to learn from the unpredictability of organized violence, and adjusting to the practicality of the protests (i.e. intervening in groups rather than alone) with the resources available (including self-funding for the initiative), OpAntiSH members like Amal and others were adamant about excluding the idea of protection, and never formed a cordon (unlike Tahrir Bodyguards and other feminist activists). However, they could intervene with force, for instance with belts, to try to make the assaulters stop and to break the circle. Despite the ambiguity between protection and rescue at the moment violence happened, their different framework for defining and acting on sexual assault – within patriarchal militarism in Egypt and the material context – made OpAntiSH different from the other groups with which they sometimes collaborated. As OpAntiSH and Tahrir Bodyguards differed in their understandings of gender roles and spaces, whether as protesters, as volunteers or in their organizational structures, this also impacted on the scope of their work and the lives of the organizations. OpAntiSH continues on social media, due to the impossibility of protest and the group's political dissociation from the current militarism. Tahrir Bodyguards ended their activity as the founders and team members engaged in other work plans.

The long-term impact of such initiatives, bound to the contingencies of protests, was not a minor factor: how to continue – whether in the face of increasing sexual assaults, no assaults, or no possible protests? In the following passage Amal explains OpAntiSH members' feeling of responsibility to intervene in a wider number of situations in the future:

We have been discussing a lot, what should we be doing if there are no events, if we have the possibility to interfere with women being assaulted by a mob, whether it is a political event or not; and here we have to go to the theory that we are concerned with women safety, but we have not operated on a level that is not during the political event. It raises lots of other questions and debates, and I would speak for myself. [...] For instance: the pro-military people are demonstrating, are we going to rescue their women? Because we are concerned with women, even if they choose to be military slaves, because they have the rights to choose to be idiots. However, me personally, I have a situation of being against this pro-military demo [on 30th June]. And for me, in a way I cannot do this. [...] Women are assaulted because of the patriarchal mentality that is impersonated by the military rule. [...] On 30th June there were many of us not against ousting the MB... but we were also against the military interventions and the authoritarian rules. But in the end, we had to intervene on almost 200 cases.

The small "third square" group of dissent mentioned by Amal, which emerged during a brief window of time in June 2013, warned that – with the change of the political scene, from Morsy to El Sisi – authoritarian rule would survive: with it, sexual violence against women, politically engaged or not, would continue, even in the absence of protests. For Amal, as for other feminist activists, acts of rescuing rather than protecting survivors of sexual assault were

already massive gestures of protest against the authoritarian patriarchy of militarization that permeated society in Egypt. The sexual politics of control exploded, with all its contradictory excesses, in the feminist rescue of survivors of sexual assaults. Although OpAntiSH can no longer intervene in the square, thanks to the current criminalization of protest and the crackdown on feminist groups and Egyptian feminists, the powerful resonance of survivors and intervention initiatives such as OpAntiSH stood as anti-authoritarian, disruptive revolutionary moments at a time when revolutionary bodies and spaces were being hijacked.

X. Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on the sexual politics of control in Cairo during the anti-authoritarian protests between 2011 and 2014. The virginity tests marked a new season of the visible sexualization of political violence: they highlighted the application of detention techniques to the square which tortured the body and psyche in order to morally criminalize the [especially female] protesters and inflict severe injuries and trauma. Figures of “mimetic assaulters” such as the thug, paid by the police to sexually harm protesters, and organized circles of hell, called into question the rationality of the domineering “fantasy of sexual violence” (Aretxaga 2005: 110) that animated security apparatuses. The public ritual of brutal and excessive gender-based violence was intended to remind Egyptian society how to belong and behave according to an asymmetrical and patriarchal gender hierarchy. Moral credibility became a weapon against female protesters in particular: their (im)modesty was linked to their political activism, and their experiences of violation were doubted so as not to tarnish the honour of the square. The bodies of assaulted protesters marked them as morally improper; their political participation was erased or stigmatized; the nation was feminized. The state reinstated itself as an exception to its own laws.

Uncontrolled state violence opened a new season of political passion for the women activists and intervention groups I have introduced in this chapter. Through their violent experiences, they rethought how domination and control could pass through different forms such as spaces, family ties, group organizations and discourses of protection. Their identities as women were newly politicized: as Aretxaga writes of the Maghaberry women prisoners in Belfast, “what became problematized by this politicization was... what being a woman meant” (Aretxaga 2005: 122). The politicized body of the women protestors was fought against and treated as an extraneous social body. Women were an obstacle to the patriarchal status quo that required them – in the family as much as in the nation – as supporters and helpers, depending on masculine validation (as also described in Chapter III regarding military wives). Subduing women as moral victims with no political agency would at times ambivalently reinforce the patriarchal figures of masculine saviours, as with intervention groups and

marches that upheld symbolic notions of protection and honour. Yet breaking the silence over sexual violence, and linking it to both militarist violence and gender roles, was much more productive for the women activists I met, and for the affective recovery of “suffering masculinities”. The attempts to break the political engagement and identity of women activists after Tahrir, by physically harming them and humiliating them, produced instead prouder and more radical femininities, and more anti-authoritarian activism.

At a time when protests are made impossible by the force of law, and when Tahrir can only be a place for nationalist celebrations or sanitized commuters, the continuation of sexual violations reaffirms that if the dominant body politic is masculine – as in military masculinity, either assaulting or protecting – assaults on women will always be invested with patriarchal values, as underlined by Aretxaga (2005). The current lack of access to Tahrir Square, which is at the centre of the women’s narratives I have presented in this chapter, does not make their defiance or their revolutionary acts any less significant. On the contrary, it makes it even more urgent to revisit the challenge these women and men still pose to the patriarchal moralization of safety, and to rethink what interventions, subjectivities and solidarities can be shaped in a time of heightened militarized fantasy and body control.

CHAPTER V

THE CITY THAT IS NOT ONE: ANTI-SEXUAL HARASSMENT INITIATIVES, URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF SAFETY

I. Introduction

I.i Of flows, blocks and paces

“Are you afraid to walk in the streets?”

Christina, the founder of an online initiative against sexual harassment, asked me this question right after greeting me, as I was catching my breath at a corner table in Café Groppi in Talaat Harb. We had arranged to meet there early one afternoon in autumn 2013, but I had arrived late. The big junction in Tahrir was closed again because of pro-Morsy protests, causing a massive traffic jam: despite my insistence, the taxi driver had stubbornly refused to pass through Downtown, leaving me in front of the giant lion statues on the right-bank side of the bridge across the Nile. I looked around: there were new barricades, some painted with the colours of the Egyptian flag, some with the sandy beige that also coloured the tanks and military uniforms visible nearby. I began walking. The few solitary passers-by showed me that it should be possible to reach the brightly coloured streams of people and cars whose noise I could hear distantly from the other side of Tahrir. The chaotic life and death of commercial Cairo was close, and yet inaccessible.

I walked through the empty and dusty square, surrounded by metres of barbed wire surveilled by young guards and their tanks. I tried to show a confidence I did not really feel. My feet moved through memories of another time, in those same places, to the fast beat of my pounding heart. While moving carefully, I saw no trace of the square bursting with people under the sizzling sun or in the evening. The only items visible were the spiked lines of control. I approached the last exit gates, looking at the few isolated men passing by, and at two women together who were coming towards me. I carefully took the paths indicated by large barricades and wires, and passed without hesitating too much, feeling small in front of the young boys on top of the tanks, holding weapons bigger than themselves. My sweat had changed from crystals to rivers and had started to stain my shirt, but it was not entirely because of the heat. Finally the classic green sign of Groppi appeared. I walked faster and looked straight ahead, bringing my pace into line with the newly discovered crowd and trying to avoid getting stopped. I was not sure if I was safer now than before. Christina’s blunt question closed the affective circuit between my body, my bodily attitude, the streets, memories, and the present moment that enmeshed me like the female body (vulnerable? powerful?) in Kassim’s painting.

She had noticed my shirt, my sticky hair, as I started to tell her why I was late. Was I afraid to walk in the streets? I hesitated for a second and looked at her, stammered. She laughed. She had her answer. “We all are.”

1.ii Engendering bodies and spaces in the city

Christina’s activism against sexual harassment in Cairo, like other experiences I present in this chapter, opened up an understanding and critique of the joint management of bodies, space and affects in everyday life in Cairo. Her question about my fear on that day – and more generally, every day – summarized how city spaces, epitomized by the streets, had become the locus where fear at once divided bodies, separated urban areas, and reoriented political and social experiences. Whenever I went walking, the fear of being harassed by the military or a passer-by was always unconsciously present, making me fear the city and influencing my embodiment. Yet at the same time I also felt that part of this might at times be an exaggerated construction of borders of violence and safety. These borders linked together discourses on street harassment, gentrification, and arbitrary punishment by the state and security apparatuses: the police and army.

In this chapter, I explore the salience of gendered borders of violence and safety in Cairo. I attempt to connect the changing urban structure to discourses and practices of gender-based violence, in particular of sexual violence in the streets, which resonated with young feminists and anti-sexual harassment initiatives that had developed in Cairo since 2010, and to the role of the state and security institutions. The concept of border I use rests on Gloria Anzaldúa’s definition in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1999), where she considers bodies, spaces and identities as deeply and simultaneously contradictory: “Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them” (Anzaldúa 1999: 3). For Anzaldúa, in defining what places and bodies are safe and unsafe, borders prevent both contact and change: at the same time, borders make visible the potential mutations of encounters. This symbolic and affective value both constitutes and creates obstacles for gendered identities and bodily expressions which are fluid, unpredictable and contentious.

Borders contradictorily structure gendered experiences in the everyday life of Cairo as a city. In the reciprocal construction of urban spaces and gender, “Cities are vital arenas in the embodiment, contestation, mobilisation, subversion and transformation of all these aspects of gender” (Bondi 2005:4). Feminist geographer Liz Bondi (2005) considers three types of gender analysis in urban life: embodied identities, social relations and performativity. For Bondi, urban experiences relate first to the anatomical categories “male” and “female” and how they are allowed in certain spaces. But gendered bodies are also produced beyond anatomy: gender

intervenes at the intersections between human bodies and their surrounding contexts, as an organizing principle of social relations. For instance, the defined spaces of Cairo's malls can be seen as a site for experimenting with gender relations, particularly for the middle class (Abaza 2001; de Koning 2009). Bondi draws on Butler's notion of the performativity of gender (1990) to state that cities offer spaces in which to performatively and affectively act gendered scripts in everyday life. Within the specificities of experiences, each urban context therefore shapes peculiar gender configurations, reproduction and production (Bondi 2005: 9). The aspiration to a comfortable life in Egypt, balancing leisure, labour and reproductive work, is described in this chapter as linked to the new gated communities and a mixture of private, military and state development in suburban areas.

Diane Massey adds that space is a "simultaneity of stories so far... places are collections of those stories" (Massey 2006: 130). If geography is an affective discipline (Boas 1887), it is also a gendered discipline. This understanding – shared by Ingold (2008) and anthropological literature on colonial encounters (for instance, Taussig 1987; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Aretxaga 1997) – interprets spaces as perceptive and mobile. Space exudes and moves moral and political dimensions of material segregation and control. Bodies carry, interact with and contradict these affective spaces as they move: the fear of assault on the streets; the pride of survival; the joy of sharing a safe space as gendered bodies.

In linking militarized walls, activism against street harassment and sexual violence, and gentrified areas, I aim to highlight a modality of gendered social and political control constructed through material and affective borders in the neoliberal, neocolonial city of Cairo. Urban order, land dispossession, safety discourses, impunity and everyday violence resonate both with the reorganization of Cairo and with the impact of everyday violence on feminist and women's rights activism. In this sense, this chapter is an exploration of the ways in which gendered bodies and spaces construct and produce each other, and of how gender and urban spaces were linked in the experiences, practices and affects of the women activists I met.

II. Flows and borders: sexual harassment and the capital of safety

In August 2008, the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights (ECWR) organized the seminar "Sexual Harassment and its Impacts on the Egyptian Economy" in the wake of their first report on sexual harassment in Egypt, *Clouds in the Sky* (2008). The seminar was co-hosted by representatives from parliament and the Ministry of Tourism (Azarghoshab 2009). The representatives emphasized the role of (foreign) women as economic resources to be safeguarded for the good of Egypt's economic growth: tourism accounted for over nine per cent of GDP in 2008 (World Travel and Tourism Council 2015). Besides affecting the job market,

sexual harassment damaged flows of foreign income and remittances into Egypt, and had a negative impact on the tourism industry.

Fast-forward six years. Sexual harassment is one of the factors keeping Egyptian women out of the shrinking local job market: as Assaad (2015) noted, if women's participation in the job market had slowed down considerably, especially for educated women, this arose from a number of requirements – including distance from work and a harassment-free environment – which greatly limited women's job opportunities (also Assaad and El-Hamidi 2009). Stories and experiences of harassment were around me all the time during my fieldwork, inseparable from life in the city. They cast a huge question mark over every walk, strangely absurd given the ambivalent love I felt for the city. I recall that once, while I was sitting in a café for a meeting, a girl stopped by to greet her friend, and showed her how her arm had been twisted in the streets in Downtown as she was assaulted by a passer-by. My interviewee, Safa, asked me: "Do you see? It is like this all the time." The breakthrough public intervention by El Sisi in "defence" of a woman harmed at the celebrations of the presidential election, described in Chapter III, and the life sentences given to the harassers, showed that sexual harassment was considered a crucial matter, even if this was arguably propaganda-led. Harassment in the square was a disturbance to the President: punishing the offenders seemed to be a personal tool for him to reaffirm his masculine control and protective patriarchy over the country. But it might be because sexual harassment in public areas had become a recognized experience in daily life, which affected mostly women.

What changed? The shift towards acknowledging sexual harassment as a local public concern is part of a long and complex process concerning the encroachment of safety, gender and space, which in part preceded Mubarak. His obsession with productivity was paralleled by support for a police state. Safety coincided with police security from the 1970s onwards (Kandil 2012). Under Mubarak, in the context of a growing social perception of peril and decadence, the further expansion of the power of security bodies took place alongside the growth of the financial sector from the early 1990s (Denis 2011) and urban transformations. The Egyptian state started to be preoccupied with a form of colonialism in its own country: Cairo acquired distinctive traits of neocolonial militarized cities (Graham 2010). This double development created a different kind of control over territories and bodies, and new ideas of social order and disorder, safety and danger. The land became the means to a new controlled urban order as well as wealth.

Beside relying on expatriates' remittances and external flows, a common historical situation in the MENA region (Beblawi 2016: 49-63), the Egyptian state has developed its activity of capital extraction by adding financial profits. Since the 1990s, with the IMF reforms, the state (and

groups of entrepreneurs-allies) have profited from the sale of large assets. Public land is one of these: in Egypt, agricultural land accounts in fact for less than four per cent of total land¹²⁹ (FAOSTAT Database 2015). Even if most laws on the use and classification of land date back to Nasser in 1964 (such as Law 142/1964), Presidential Decree 7/1991, validated under Mubarak, mentions new decrees establishing the tracts of land that belong to the army, and the right of any ministry to obtain land with the approval of the Council of Ministers.¹³⁰ The Ministry of Defence can reclaim or assign lands and impose decisions concerning the use of such areas, over the heads of the Ministries of Housing, Tourism and Agriculture (Decree 933/1988). This implies that the principle of the state monopoly on land and its financial capitalization has been largely delegated to the armed forces. From there, it has been transferred to and divided between private companies, which have rebuilt the new landscape of a safe Cairo, with walls and communities.

The speculation on land to create gated communities and set up controlled examples of “urban order” facilitated the cultivation of private-corporate interests where the state combined with local private businesses over sensitive protected areas, from Fayoum to the Red Sea (Sowers 2013). This was encouraged by the land reform of 1992, which tripled the minimum rent, thereby increasing the concentration of land in the hands of the rich and forcing one million Egyptian tenants off their land (Ibrahim and Ibrahim 2003: 102; Mitchell 2002: 265). After *Infitah*, public housing projects served the interests of a group of upper-middle-class business families (Sims 2010). Together with export trade groups, and new groups emerging financially thanks to neoliberal reforms and the significant liberalization of the financial sector (Denis 2014), these elites have shaped the urbanization of the country since the 1990s.

By 2015, four of the wealthiest private companies in Egypt were development companies, run by an extremely limited number of Egyptian families (EGX Index 2015): Orascom Construction and Orascom Hotels Holding (the Sawiris, first overall in Egypt); Palm Hills (the Meghraby and Mansour families); and Egyptian for Tourism Resort (the Kamel family). Other companies, such as Degla, Sodiq and Emaar Misr, help to make real-estate companies a powerful force in attracting capital, although they are not strictly family-led. In particular, Emaar Misr, a subsidiary of the UAE-based Emaar Development Company, was launched on the stock market

¹²⁹ The erosion of agricultural land is particularly paradoxical given that the agricultural trade deficit in Egypt is over 2,000 million USD a year (Butter 2014: 127).

¹³⁰ Mohamed Elshahed mentions a 1997 Presidential Decree granting the army all unused land in his article: “From Tahrir Square to Emaar Misr: Cairo’s private road to a private city.” *The Guardian*. 7th April 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/apr/07/tahrir-square-emaar-square-cairo-private-road-city>. Last access: 10th November 2016. I could not find any such decree in that year. Overall, de facto, unused Egyptian land belongs to the army.

in early summer 2015, having signed a favourable agreement with the Egyptian Ministry of Defence.¹³¹

As Roccu (2013) argues, such private wealth unavoidably translates into forms of political control. These public-private alliances are encouraged by the UNDP and the World Bank to promote financial adjustments under the discursive shield of housing rights (Simcik Arese 2015). Whereas developing internal production and using an effective system of taxation would have enabled a more democratic redistribution, renting the land (or selling it while maintaining a form of financial control over it) achieves consistent accumulation. Accumulation economically facilitates the well-established neopatrimonialism and nepotism, as happened under Mubarak as much as under Morsy (Achcar 2013), while delegating safety to private societies and military bodies. Under Mubarak's system of repressing the opposition as well as co-opting businessmen (including those in opposition parties: El Tarouty 2015), local politicians were indistinguishable from investors. The state practically subsidized the developers by constructing all the infrastructure necessary to connect often very distant plots in areas of Greater Cairo to the centre (Kuppinger 2004), effectively privatizing public services and land (Fahmy and Sutton 2008; Mitchell 1999). When he announced New Capital in the desert east of Cairo in 2014,¹³² President El Sisi made it clear that no public money would be spent, presenting the new capital of Egypt as a privately owned and run project (Lambert 2014). Cairo was "made" safe by means of enclosed private communities on what was once public land. Private security was thus aligned with – and allowed to exclude or be complicit with – the police state and the military state. The complex mingling of private and "public" interests divided the city of Cairo along new borders, which were apparently only marked by class, but which were also inscribed onto gendered bodies.

III. Buying protection in the desert: social reproduction and consumption

The privatization of urbanization and land development in suburban areas of Greater Cairo became a privileged and legal way to construct the order of the city around controlled violence, and designed the profile of a protected, gendered citizen-consumer belonging to a certain class – as in other parts of the world (Caldeira 2000; Low 2003; Bagaeen and Uduku

¹³¹ Doaa Farid. "Emaar Misr signs protocol with Ministers of Defence, Investment and Local Development." *Daily News Egypt*. 18th February 2014. <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2014/02/18/emaar-misr-signs-protocol-ministers-defence-investment-local-development/>. Last access: 20th January 2015.

¹³² New Capital is intended to replace or complement the widely advertised "Cairo 2050" project commissioned by the Ministry of Public Affairs in 2002. Source: <http://thecapitalcairo.com/about.html>. Last access: 20th January 2015.

2010). But to lure citizens into the desert, safety and protected freedom had to be made appealing, while the danger and discomfort of the unruly had to be highlighted.

Sims (2014), drawing partly on Denis (2006), interprets in various ways the urban expansion into the desert beyond a radius of 60 km from Downtown. It was partly propaganda, to show the power of President Mubarak through the Dubai-ization of Cairo (Barthel and Vignal 2014; El Sheshtawy 2016), especially with the alliance with Emaar Misr. It was a promise of new jobs and economic improvement, which mostly benefited the contractors themselves and made little impact on the workers. It was also one of the investments middle- and upper-class families could make to acquire a property “stash” in case of need (much as women might save gold for emergencies: see Singerman 1999: 282).

I suggest two more elements that contribute to the appeal of order built in the desert. The distance from the city plays a role in keeping political struggle and the chaos of everyday urban life at bay. Residents can enjoy a “distant gaze” over the city and the “other” Egyptians. Secluded sites look out from afar at “the gleam of Cairo lights” (as a brochure of Emaar Misr puts it) – which might well be the fires of protests. The politics of the “distant gaze” reduces the potential for political engagement and community solidarity outside forms of charity. Cairo becomes a landscape. The gaps between societal privilege and dispossession are kept wide open by the security measures protecting and surrounding certain communities where “the chants of Tahrir will never be heard” (Elshahed 2014).

Furthermore, buying safety in the desert is not only about real-estate value, but is also an investment in the potential future of the heterosexual middle- and upper-class family. As a house provided by the groom’s family (even if it is furnished by the bride’s family) is part of the marriage agreement, being able to provide a home is a prerequisite for starting a family. Gated communities offer a wide range of supposedly high-quality services in this regard: security is not only important for its own sake, but is also a form of accumulation for the family. These developments project neoliberalized, IMF-approved consumerist family aspirations: luxurious shopping malls (Elsheshtawy 2006); private schools and activity centres offering exclusive services; universities; even the Real Madrid Football Academy, in Degla’s New Giza compound. Gated developments are a version of perfected, struggle-free community order – or at least a community “ambiance”, as Emaar Misr advertises it. They boast a reassuring mix of cosmopolitan Egyptian life, secure and moral without being religiously conservative.

New developments introduce forms of segregation that are more subtly political. They are repackaged as a convenient choice for social reproduction. They speak of the hopes,

aspirations and fears of instability of the middle- and upper-class heterosexual family. These communities offer the possibility of upward mobility for oneself and one's family that the job market and education have discouraged. Just as some wealthy Egyptians choose to give birth in the US, in order to grant their children the double nationality that one day may help them to emigrate or study abroad, owning a property in a compound is an acquisition of the right to safety. The gendering of social reproduction embedded in gated communities secures a micro-world of control which contains the means of its own perpetuation. Safety is resolved as a social reproductive matter, void of political desires. Danger is constructed as an "outside" reality, beyond the development's borders. Violence does not have to be tackled: it can be avoided or bought off; it can be tamed by the entry guards. Quality of life has turned into a commodity for those who can afford it: the state takes part in capital extraction only.

As Eric Denis has underlined, "the post-colonial city was created by nationalizing the instruments and properties that had made imperial exploitation possible. The neoliberal megacity is now developing by destroying these collective assets" (Denis 2011: 155). Mixing the "nationalist tradition" of Egyptian architecture with American and European landscapes, gates reassure visitors and residents that the country is being kept safe and orderly, unlike the world outside it. They match the tastes of a neoliberal, global vision of struggle-free modernity and development. Brochures and websites of developers such as Emaar Misr and NewGiza underline the key assets of these self-sufficient and exclusive compounds¹³³, the most alluring for buyers: the serenity of the community environment, with its green areas, play corners, golf clubs and relaxing spots; the integrated mix of residential and commercial areas together with excellent education facilities, leisure venues, five-star hotels and business hubs; the cosmopolitan outlook, inspired by French Boulevards and Spanish Ramblas as well as by Mediterranean and Latino architecture; the closeness to the American University of Cairo and to the airport. The small barracks at the entrances to the gated areas differentiate the private compounds from military compounds, beautifying the commodification of safety and the patriarchal privileges within.

IV. Disciplining properties: surveillance and informal settlements

Productive control over gendered bodies in these gated, struggle-free spaces of consumption and leisure highlights what the city is not, politically and socially. The desire for policed order is built on the horror of disorder as materially and symbolically dangerous. Cairo was redesigned in the early 19th century for the purposes of order by Ali Mubarak, Minister for Education and

¹³³ See: "The Good Life Magazine 2016". Emaar Misr. http://www.emaarmisr.com/Content/Media/Files/CategoryContent//7689/TGLMagazine2016_FINAL.pdf. 2016. Last access: 15th March 2015.

Public Works, following the example of counter-revolutionary Paris and its working and political relationships (Mitchell 1991: 63). Paris built the boulevards to impede barricades and enhance work and trade; Cairo was destined for the same treatment. Working relations have changed since the modern era. The grids of the capital city have collapsed, not simply because of demographic pressure, but especially because of the accumulating lack of infrastructure and planning. Far from being a relic of the colonial past, the order of the city returns as a constant in the frequent references to Cairo as a chaotic metropolis out of control (Bayat and Denis 2000; Denis 2008; Sims 2010). Urban order means surveillance: CCTV eyes in some metro stations, such as Tahrir; plain-clothes policemen, as seen in Chapter IV; online investigations and neighbours' reports (Abdelrahman 2015b); the privately controlled borders of walled communities and military zones.

The surveillant gaze controls by stigmatizing details: class, gender, embodiment, race, age. Entire areas of Cairo represent the gender- and class-stigmatized "other" of the city, in its unruly explosion of informal communities or *ashwaiyyat* (literally "half hazard") (Bayat and Denis 2000). For Bayat and Denis, the process taking place in the main centres of Egypt, as in other world cities, is the urbanization of small cities and peripheries and the depopulation of the centre – Cairo lost half a million people in 10 years between 1986 and 1996 (Bayat and Denis 2000: 187). Urban informality is translated into social and political disapproval. The moral disorder and radicalization attached to informal communities is for Bayat and Denis a projection and a consequence of the costs of formalization. This cost is rejected both by the state, which does not want to invest in infrastructure (for instance, using the money raised by land concessions to developers), and by many residents, who do not want to lose the relative autonomy and benefits that informality gives them compared to the legal system.

The lack of discipline that informal settlements represent stands against the peaceful and productive landscape of the gated communities. Violence is constructed here not as the border or grid, but as the outside of the order built inside the new walled lines of the city. Flows of bodies, spatial grids and violence are planned and made together. Gender and class relations, as inside the gated communities, acquire value in supporting the stigmatization of the *ashwaiyyat*.

V. The disorders of "informal masculinity"

With the *ashwaiyyat*, it is particularly clear how unruly spaces are affectively attached to violent gendered and classed bodies in the anxiety over safety. The lack of control and order in the informal areas of Cairo is frequently linked to the masculine figure of the sexual harasser wandering the streets. Young males from informal communities affirm the borders that the

city has established between order and disorder in the open and uncontrolled realm of the roads. “It used not to be like that” was a refrain I would hear often, together with stories of men who in past decades had been shaved by the police if they tried to harass women in the street. A difficult urban context lacking proper infrastructure emphasized street violence against women and made it more intense and recurrent, even if it was not restricted to Cairo alone.¹³⁴

In 2013 Zahra, one of the most prominent activists against sexual harassment, made a controversial comment to me about informality and masculinity: “They are the guys that come and enjoy the freedom they finally have in the centre of the town... they think they can finally do whatever they want, and harass as a consequence.” In Zahra’s opinion, the centre of town had become a theatre for a gendered performance. Here boys from informal settlements could display an aggressive masculinity that would not be allowed where they lived. Contrariwise, when I asked young activist Sara about sexual harassment and violence in everyday life, she drily replied that “It is a problem of middle-class women... the ones that would not take off their *shib-shib* (slipper) and throw it at the harasser.” Both Zahra and Sara relied on class-inflected images: the harasser was a low-income, aggressive young male from the poor outskirts of the city; the harassed was a middle-class woman, without the resilient embodiment or social experience of quicker-witted and bolder low-income women.

Sexual harassment as a masculine attack against the more privileged areas of the city is conceptualized here as a discrepancy between the city’s ideal order and its gender and class order. Yet, despite the order, violence persisted: police abuses, street and workplace harassment, domestic violence, sexual violence. Malak, a radical young Egyptian-Sudanese feminist, described to me how two other activists put verbal assaults on femininities and masculinities to the test:

Ask Lamyia. She and a male friend did this experiment. They went in the streets and acted a harassment scene. He started harassing her, badly, and basically none intervened. Then they changed the act. She was the one harassing him. And guess what, not only none intervened, but some were even cheering for her! That tells you that harassment... is a matter of power.

Without generalizing Malak’s example, the “exchangeable roles” here are nonetheless indicative of a fight over the meanings of power and control. The order and position of spaces and bodies naturalize moral and social harmony, and their disorder justifies violence.

¹³⁴ Feminist activists called attention to the cases of women killed by their harassers in other governorates: Eman Mostafa, shot in Assiut after spitting at her harasser and refusing him; Shorouk El Tarby, run over in Gharbya while trying to escape her harasser in order to press charges against him at the police station.

Harassment as a “gendered expression of power” (Uggen and Blackstone 2004) reveals the profound crisis behind the desire for urban order. This crisis, made visible in everyday life by street harassment, pivots on the deep-seated question of whether violence and its urban solutions are supportive or disruptive – or both – of safe order.

VI. Sexual harassment between capital accumulation and masculinist restoration

Paul Amar (2011b) has critiqued class-based remarks and initiatives by some anti-sexual harassment groups in Cairo that focused on informal communities and working-class masculinities. For Amar, through an obsession with the “libidinal perversion of working class boys”, groups such as the ECWR further depoliticized the problem of sexual harassment by not criticizing the state’s use of sexual violence. ECWR asked for increased interventions by the police – which is often the perpetrator – to help make women safe (Amar 2011b: 314). The state used harassment as “a nodal controversy for addressing (and deflecting) issues of labor mobility, police brutality, class conflict, youth alienation and social disintegration in an increasingly polarized polity” (Amar 2011: 303).

As noted in Chapters II and III, some women’s initiatives uncritically supported the state by adhering to liberal and state feminism. I suggest here though that besides deflecting other issues, the criminalization of informality also materially profited the state (and other actors, such as the army) through its various investments in gated developments. The impunity of harassment, and of violence more generally, rests on the fact that the state is the first perpetrator of violence. But state silence about and institutional dismissal of street harassment and sexual violence – at least until 2014 – is perhaps of a different kind than the silence about political violence and the abuses of the security system.

Deniz Kandiyoti has argued that gender-based violence concerns the crisis of the gendered arrangements of “patriarchy-as-usual” (Kandiyoti 2013). This crisis requires new and different forms of subjugation, and also complicit institutional silence about gender-based violence. What she calls a process of “masculinist restoration” violently intervenes “when notions of female subordination are no longer securely hegemonic” (Kandiyoti 2014). Kandiyoti’s argument parallels Silvia Federici’s (2004) analysis of violence against women due to what can be called “accumulation-as-usual”. Federici connects violence against women in the 15th and 16th centuries in Western Europe to the birth of capitalism as a reactionary dynamic. She notes a coincidence between moments of heightened violence and the accumulation of labour power, quoting Michael Taussig (1980), who argues that beliefs in the Devil circulate in historical moments of change between modes of production.

In both analyses, violence against women is a tool to restore hierarchies of oppression and an order in crisis. As capitalism and its accumulation are served by patriarchy through production and reproduction, patriarchy is served by renewed affective and material structures of the military-neoliberal city, such as development plans and accumulation, in relation to gendered and classed safety. Violence is not enacted and faced coherently: it is not one – like the city and its bodies. As part of the masculinist restoration “that requires systematic indoctrination (Islamic, nationalistic or mixtures of both), greater surveillance and higher levels of intrusion in citizens’ lives” (Kandiyoti 2014), gender, class and race are fused in urban spaces, transits and transformations.

To restore itself in a new shape and renew its own hegemony, the patriarchal state in Egypt simultaneously works materially, discursively and affectively on the fractures between bodies as national spaces and the actual spaces for bodies. The state’s silence on non-state sexual harassment and violence supports and is supported by the privatization of safety for social reproduction in the new urban order in Cairo.

As Aretxaga (2005) notes, bodily violence does not necessarily suppress all forms of organized resistance. But the difficulty of coalescing around the issue of sexual harassment – a strong social taboo – also encompasses not only the state as perpetrator, transnational infrastructures, non-state actors and constraints (Naber and Abdel Hameed 2016), but also the ways in which tackling sexual violence, the city and its bodies might benefit the state, politically and economically.

VII. The everyday of sexual harassment

The everyday of harassment was present in conversations at cafés, with friends, with acquaintances; in the ghostly fear that the encounter with Christina made clearer for me; in dress habits and ways of moving, looking straight ahead and keeping my gaze neutral while focusing on the street. Walking was unavoidable, and was often a distressing and traumatic experience for all the women I met. Amal summed up the tension between two uneasy choices – putting up with unwanted attention, or agreeing to be accompanied in public: “Every time you have to ask someone, a male friend, to come with you, even for a short walk... you are crushed. You don’t want to do it, but then you have to. It is heartbreaking.”

Street harassment is interpreted as a specification of sexual harassment in a public space (Bowman 1993; MacMillan, Nierobisz and Welsh 2000). Cases of street harassment are identified as a range of violations of personal bodily and social integrity: verbal assaults, physical targeting, ogling, rape and murder. They occur daily, but with greater intensity during festivities, such as with the infamous Eid al Fitr mob harassment in 2006. Research on street

harassment in Egypt was led for the most part by local activists, and grounded in local definitions. The definition adopted by HarassMap was “any form of unwelcome words and/or actions of a sexual nature that violate a person’s body, privacy, or feelings and make that person feel uncomfortable, threatened, insecure, scared, disrespected, startled, insulted, intimidated, abused, offended, or objectified”.¹³⁵ The Egyptian Arabic term used for sexual harassment, regardless of the context where it happens, is *al-taharrush al-ginsy*. This term is now preferred to *mu’akta* or flirtation (Abdelmonem 2015a: 23; Kirolos 2014), which linguistically concealed the criminal aspect. It is a relatively new use of the term, which previously was mostly used for rape by women’s associations such as the ECWR (Abdelmonem 2015a: 33). It always indicates an unwanted and coercive act of a sexual nature (Hassan et al. 2008).

According to the large number of personal stories I heard and shared, harassment as a public discourse started to gain attention among the young in the mid-2000s. In 2005 the ECWR started a campaign called “Safe Streets for Everyone” (Rizzo et al. 2012). The first sentence for sexual harassment – three years’ prison with hard labour and a fine for groping Noha Roushdy¹³⁶ in the streets – was handed down in 2008 under Article 268 (assault). The Taskforce Against Sexual Violence was founded in 2008 by 16 Egyptian NGOs, including feminist and women’s associations, to offer legal and psychological support to survivors. In December 2010 the taskforce, which later included 23 NGOs, issued a proposal that adopted “an integrated, rights-based approach to protect against all forms of sexual violence without discrimination”,¹³⁷ and precisely defined rape (*ightiṣab*), sexual assault (*’etida’ ginsy*) and sexual harassment (*taharrush ginsy*) against existing Penal Code provisions and proposed amendments (see also Kirolos 2016: 55). In 2010 HarassMap, the first independent initiative to tackle the social acceptability of sexual harassment online and on the ground, launched its mapping software and website.

The popularity of discourses on violence and danger exploded after 25th January 2011: the escalation of political violence against women at protests, described in Chapter IV, facilitated the opening of debate on all forms of sexual violence. From 2011 a number of new initiatives contributed to the fight: among others, Harakat Basma/Imprint Movement, Ded Al Taharrus

¹³⁵ HarassMap. “What is sexual harassment?” <http://harassmap.org/en/resource-center/what-is-sexual-harassment>. Last access: 5th December 2015.

¹³⁶ Her story became part of the plot of a successful and prize-winning Egyptian movie focusing on sexual harassment, *678* (2010) by Mohamed Diab.

¹³⁷ “The taskforce combating sexual violence launches a bill to amend Penal Code provisions on sexual violence.” *Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights*. 19th December 2010. eipr.org/en/pressrelease/2011/01/23/1090. Last access: 10th October 2016.

(Against Harassment), Shoft Taharrush (I Saw Harassment), Nazra for Feminist Studies, Tahrir Bodyguards and Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment.

In 2014, a number of professors at Cairo University – among them Hoda El Sadda, a long-standing member of the Women and Memory Forum – founded the first university anti-harassment unit. This was a response to the public statement by Cairo University President Gaber Nasser that he would investigate a female student who had been harassed because her attire had provoked male students.¹³⁸ The unit developed a policy¹³⁹ and a task force, and assigned trained representatives to each of the 24 faculties of the university.¹⁴⁰ Its implementation is still unclear at the moment (i.e. whether the police or a private security company will be in charge of it) and it faces some challenges (for instance, regarding harassment by professors), but it represents a positive step in joining the work of activist groups to tackle violence within a central institution for many Egyptian students.

Mariz Tadros (2013b) separates the everyday violence of street harassment from sexual violence during specific moments and spaces of political participation. In her view, political violence is also more difficult to be legally recognized (Tadros 2013b: 6–7). Street harassment is unplanned, and differently motivated – by masculine “enjoyment”, sexual deprivation (see also Ilahi 2009: 64), or a desire to dominate women in the street. Similar reasons were given by Fatima Peoples (2008), who argued that sexual harassment in Egypt started in the 1980s as a consequence of women’s public visibility in the workplace and the rise of male unemployment. Although marital status, education, unemployment and structural explanations for sexual harassment have been empirically disproven (Hassan et al. 2008; Fahmy et al. 2014), I maintain Tadros’s distinction.

VIII. Between political violence and sexual harassment

Where sites of protest highlight heightened violence against women protestors, sexual harassment in the everyday streets makes for a continuous type of public pain. For many activists, political violence and sexual harassment are two separate but interrelated dimensions. In a 2014 campaign, the feminist associations Nazra and CEWLA presented the project “Qanun Nashaz” (legal dissonance), which focused on the legal limitations that

¹³⁸ The statement was later withdrawn after several complaints from activists. President Nasser later approved the anti-harassment unit.

¹³⁹ HarassMap campaigned for a similar policy, which received the support of many young feminists (Abdelmonem 2015).

¹⁴⁰ “Initiative to stand against sexual harassment at Cairo University.” Cairo University. <https://cu.edu.eg/anti-harassment>. Last access: 5th December 2015. The official website’s “What to do” page is rather succinct: it suggests that in cases of harassment, one should contact the representative immediately, and collect as much evidence as possible

prevented all types of violence, both political and non-political, against women – and also against men as a whole – from being punished. The transnational MENA group Uprising of Women in the Arab World (UWAW) published a permanent statement online in 2013, with the intent of talking about the multiple forms of violence that women in the MENA region experience in the spaces of daily life, beside the horrific political violence against women protestors:

It is just as interesting to observe that most of those who are shocked by the brutality used against women during protests don't seem to mind the physical, sexual and psychological violence that women in the Arab world are facing every single day of their lives.¹⁴¹

The relationship between politics and initiatives against sexual harassment was not straightforward. Although all groups working on harassment would agree on the importance of recognizing that sexual harassment is a crime, there were some differences in the interpretation of discourses of safety and punishment. Many activists who spoke to me were reluctant to talk about sexual harassment, as they felt it would hijack the general struggle against sexual violence – both locally and transnationally – and depoliticize social change. Aliaa saw it as a potentially conservative discourse in a country where militarized violence did not need any further support. Habiba underlined that there was so much harassment going on at all levels – “from work harassment, of which little is known, to FGM, to police harassment” – that focusing on street harassment alone often reduced sexual and gender-based violence to a single aspect. For others, such as Lana and Manal, it was a way to frame violence as a palatable “sexy topic”: it would attract external and Western funding because of its non-political character and its racialized construction of beastly Middle Eastern society. Applying for funding for a sexual harassment initiative would be easier than for other initiatives on gender issues.

All the young initiatives tackling harassment that I came across relied largely on volunteers, and the issue of funding seemed more reflective of the general instability of the NGO field, as described in Chapter II. Any funding or support was limited to a specific scope, such as the research funding received from the Canadian International Development Research Centre by HarassMap,¹⁴² incubated by Nahdet el Mahrousa, to analyse the effectiveness of their online platform. Crowdfunding, charity events and personal networks were widely used by all organizations to collect the funds needed to carry on, as mentioned in Chapter II. The lack of

¹⁴¹ Uprising of Women in the Arab World. “Our bodies are not battlefield.” <http://uprisingofwomenintheArabWorld.com/?p=2145&lang=en>. Last access: 27th April 2016.

¹⁴² IDRC. “HarassMap: using crowdsourced data in the social sciences.” <https://www.idrc.ca/en/project/harassmap-using-crowdsourced-data-social-sciences?ProjectNumber=106623>. Last access: 8th September 2016.

funding and the difficulty of sustaining a strategy to tackle sexual harassment could also be seen in the many temporary groups without long-term strategies which emerged and disappeared very quickly in 2013, in parallel with the better-organized initiatives that are still ongoing. The rapid life cycle of such initiatives was explained by Rania in terms of breadth of scope and limitedness of resources which risked compromising the purpose of the initiatives. Like OpAntiSH in a different context, they did not do advocacy work and preferred to operate at the grassroots level. Nazra, however, did undertake advocacy work on sexual violence, including sexual harassment, and offered various types of support to harassed women.

While quick expansion may be attractive for groups, as they diversify their activities and recruit more interested members (as well as potential funding), the risk Rania underlined is that the purpose of these groups may then become weaker and more difficult to manage. Political violence and sexual harassment were dealt with in different ways for this reason too, although they overlapped. The risks associated with expansion were visible in Tahrir Bodyguards, whose team grew into a second initiative, called Dignity Without Borders, against sexual harassment in the streets. It was launched online in late 2013, sharing excerpts of short interviews recorded in Cairo with underage minors (presumably from low-income backgrounds) who were asked what for them caused harassment. Their answers converged mostly on women's inappropriate clothing and women's lack of respect for the social norms of modesty. Any perplexity over the initiative – the questionable methodology used; the culturalization of sexual harassment; the essentialization of low-income male children – cannot be elaborated on, as the initiative closed at the same time as Tahrir Bodyguards in 2014. Only the online social media pages testify that it ever existed, leaving unanswered the question of the impact it may have had.

The separation of volunteering from politics represented an advantage for some. Because of the constant need to sustain its work, HarassMap has kept volunteer recruitment open to anyone, without sticking to definitions of feminism. Anybody can join the initiative as long as they are against harassment. Basma/Imprint, I Saw Harassment and Against Harassment also work in similar ways. While this encourages a large variety of women and men to join, Rania and Galila from HarassMap both recognize that it also creates an unresolved dilemma between the desire to engage communities as broadly as possible and the different worldviews that tackling violence against women can imply. It is possible that a volunteer who is against harassment may consider controlling women to be part of the solution. While OpAntiSH and Nazra make explicit their feminist stance on gender-based violence, the recruitment of HarassMap volunteers is kept non-denominational. Further training for volunteers at HarassMap speaks of gender issues in ways that are not condescending but that – according to

Rania – are not alienating either, especially in the first phases. Tadros (2015) states that the organic growth and engagement of both women and men in organizations such as Basma/Imprint and HarassMap was possible because they did not start by setting gender goals immediately, thus surviving the polarization of the country and the radicalization of politics. The alienation of politics, and of feminism, raises the question of why speaking about gender issues and women's right to integrity is still marked by the fear of radicalism.

The preference for a human-rights and often socially focused approach, and for the warlike spatial language of "bodies as battlefields" – used by the collective behind UWAW – addresses political violence as an outrageous peak in an ongoing struggle against multiple forms of gender-based violence. This frame encompasses initiatives on sexual harassment and on sexual violence against protestors. Major anti-harassment groups intervened against sexual violence at protests. Conversely, Tahrir Bodyguards and OpAntiSH, described in Chapter III, collaborated on initiatives against sexual harassment, although Angie Abdelmonem notes that the transition was more difficult for them (Abdelmonem 2015b). A regime of impunity and of condoning the perpetrators exists within the same power hierarchies and social and moral norms (Tadros 2014: 10).

IX. Impunity and the language of the law

Impunity is facilitated by a lack of legal clarity. The Egyptian Penal Code contains a number of measures (Articles 267, 268 and 276, as well as the charges described in Articles 306 and 308) that are used in cases of sexual harassment, even if they are not specific about it. Beside the issue of their actual application, these articles do not clearly define the target of harassment, but rather mention violence as a violation of decency and honour (*hatk 'ird*, Article 268¹⁴³) or public indecency (*fi'l fadih*, Article 276), and narrowly define rape as forced vaginal intercourse with a penis (Article 267). Both the body and the sense of safety of the target are addressed in rather vague and opaque terms, which are subject to interpretation, and which do not recognize sexual violence outside of the limitations specified. Assaults with objects are not considered rape; nor is marital rape criminalized.

Drafts proposed by NGOs and activist networks since 2008 (summarized in the 2013 Nazra report on sexual harassment and political violence) sketched alternative ways to include more specific definitions of sexual violence, bodily rights and accountability. In June 2014, after the group assaults during the celebrations for the new president El Sisi, the amendments and additions to Articles 306A and 307A signed by transitional president Adly Mansour were applied for the first time. In article 306A, *taharrush* is introduced and defined as "confronting

¹⁴³ I also discuss this article in Chapter IV.

others". This is a gender-neutral term demanded by feminist organizations, and it includes gestures, words and actions expressed in person or through any means of communication. Penalties became more severe (in terms of minimum and maximum imprisonment and fines), and repetition of the activity would be considered stalking. Article 306B was also added to increase the criminalization of harassment and the penalties (including in cases where the harasser is in a position of authority over the harassed), albeit while specifying that harassment occurs with the intention to receive benefits of a sexual nature from the harassed. Although harassment (*taharrush*) is now included as a term in the Penal Code, the laws will still raise issues. It will be difficult to prove harassment if the intentions of the perpetrators are up for debate, since the intention of sexual benefit is included in the article. It will also be difficult to prove sexual harassment at work, as occupational authority is an aggravating condition. Finally, the damage to the harassed is still left unconsidered. Although 31 organizations have complained about the need for reform, no further steps have been taken.

State and security institutions position themselves as exceptions to the law when they are perpetrators. Daily life experiences of sexual harassment perhaps more strongly represented the various and contradictory attempts to normalize oppression and women's marginalization which made the city inhospitable and divided, within the systemic silence of the state and its patriarchal system. The silence of institutions,¹⁴⁴ however, was not practised with indifference.

X. The ambiguity of institutions: the police

The silence and general lack of legislation supported the police intimidation of assaulted women. As the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights first calculated in 2008 concerning selected urban areas, and as a UN Women research project across the whole of Egypt confirmed in 2013, 99.3 per cent of Egyptian women have experienced sexual harassment at least once in their lives (El Deeb 2013). A parallel Reuters investigation received media attention when their poll of gender experts declared Egypt the worse place in the Middle East for women.¹⁴⁵ Only 23.2 per cent choose to report their experiences of harassment, and 20 per cent of those who do report it are reprimanded and harassed by the police.¹⁴⁶

The ambiguity of state institutions towards political violence (see Chapter III) is further revealed by their contradictory attitudes towards sexual harassment, as researchers and

¹⁴⁴ The only investigations followed the Eid al-Adha mob attacks in 2009 and the mob attack on 8th June 2014.

¹⁴⁵ Crina Boros. "Egypt is worst Arab state for women, Comoros best: survey". *Reuters*. 12th November 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-arab-women-idUSBRE9AB00820131112>. Last access: 4th June 2016.

¹⁴⁶ Even lower rates (two to three per cent) of reporting are stated in surveys in the ECWR 2008 report and the HarassMap 2014 report. See Fahmy et al. (2014).

activists Hind Zaki and Dalia Abd El Hameed comment (2014). In 2006, one year after Black Wednesday, no complaints were made about the first mass harassment of women in Downtown Cairo during Eid. The widely publicized life sentences handed down by the court in six cases of sexual harassment in Tahrir during the celebrations for El Sisi in 2014 sent the opposite message to the public.

In the words of Christina, the young activist living in a working-class area of Cairo who started her own popular Facebook page against harassment, her experience of harassment was heavily affected by police harassment:

The first thing that started it all happened on a mini bus. This man... he was a middle-age man, and he started touching me. At first lightly, then it was really too much... So I screamed, and I made the bus stop. He jumped out and I followed him and I managed to find him and take him to the police station. He was lying and saying all sort of excuses – that he was sick, that he had a problem with his back and that for this reason his body touched mine... that he had no intention but the bus is small. He was ridiculous. What kind of back pain he had, when he made such a big jump from the bus, trying to escape! He just wanted to make my words look like an exaggeration of a weak woman. But the worse thing was how the police officers treated me. They dismissed me. They said, come on girl, this was nothing, nothing happened. I could not report my case... They laughed at me. So I felt harassed twice.

This tragic story is emphasized by the excuses of the man, who tried to explain the physical touching in terms of the shared space – perhaps suggesting either that no one was responsible, or that Christina was responsible too, as the space was too tight to avoid bodily contact. Christina later visited her harasser's family and used the family framework to confront her assaulter privately and expose the abuse. But the experience was so dramatic for her that for months she was not able to leave home and stopped going to work, compromising her own survival. The security body that was supposed to be of help institutionally was the first to fail to recognize her as wounded, bodily and psychologically. The officers adopted a paternalistic and moralistic approach, and refused to take up her case. In their refusal to recognize the assault on her sexuality, Christina identifies a second harassment: she was reminded of the border between herself and justice, because of her female body and sexuality. This situation of abuse underlines how institutions themselves cooperate in the expansion of sexual harassment by not offering support to attacked women and by devaluing their experience of violence and their bodies. It is worth noticing that one of the points for future implementation at HarassMap during my fieldwork specifically concerned approaching and possibly training security guards to whom they would explain how to recognize sexual harassment and intervene, including in universities and public institutions. However, it is debatable whether

ignorance of sexual violence or lack of faith in the law, as shared by HarassMap, was the reason for the arbitrariness of the police in dismissing reported cases of harassment.

Police abuses were permitted with the rise of the security forces from Nasser to Mubarak (Kandil 2012: 197–200; Ismail 2014), engendering a para-regime that at times collaborated with and at times acted against the state. Basma Abd El Aziz, a researcher at El Nadeem, argued in her 2011 study *Eghraa' Al Solta Al Mutlaka* (Temptation of Absolute Power) that the transformation of police authority was a response to the expansion of what the regime called its enemies down the years: de facto, an ever-growing number of civilians, and the whole of society during the 2011 uprisings. Abdel Aziz sees this psychologically as a master-slave relationship which goes materially unpunished: the master-police can exercise absolute control over the slave-people without fear of punishment. Zaki and Abd El Hameed (2014) comment on the complicit abuses of the police in cases of political violence and sexual harassment in Egypt, using the spatial concept of the “domestication of the public sphere” (Scott and Keates 2004). This concept describes the relationship between public and private spaces in a context where the state maintains structural fragility. Here, the hierarchies within the private sphere extend to the public domain. Gender, class and race discrimination reflects the management of the household on a larger scale. According to Zaki and Abd El Hameed, the entrenched social value of classism replaced the state: for this reason Egyptian police would not support assaulted citizens or citizens at risk if their status was lower than that of the policemen themselves.

Both positions argue fundamental points. What could withstand such a domineering, patriarchal authority, expressed through bodily and psychological violence and dismissal? Perhaps we should look not only at the horizontal plane – of domestic spaces, of the division between “public” and “home” – or the vertical plane – master-slave domination – but also at the three-dimensional environment these planes engendered. Pervasive contradictions come together to make bodies and spaces to discard or keep, to oppress or spare. Despite affirmations that the nation is one again, it is divided through material and affective borders. Bodies carry their own spaces and stories, and their own punishment, unless – as with the gated communities – they buy it off.

As the state hides or denies political violence, it also attaches sexual violence to specific bodies, gender relations, class relations and spaces – like the *ashwaiyyat* or the condoned harassers. Sexual violence reinforces the feminization of the nation that affectively supports its power – unless public condemnation of sexual violence reinforces the military patriarchy as protective, as in El Sisi’s public statement in 2014. Patriarchal hierarchies of control and subordination over women and non-hegemonic masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt

2005) – together with classism and other trajectories of oppression – reveal the law as superfluous and make the punishment arbitrary.

XI. Gazes, minds and muscles: embodiment and criminalization in sexual harassment initiatives

Together with campaigns to break the silence on violence, the social and institutional advocacy of the punishment and criminalization of harassers was seen as a major tool for the elimination of violence. HarassMap and Imprint both shifted from using the language of kin (“we are your mothers and sisters”) to the language of crime in different areas of Egypt (see also Tadros 2015). Handing over the offender to the police was always a main aim of Imprint, according to Zahra, one of its founders. She commented: “We move in groups, wearing a t-shirt, and when we catch someone we hand him to the police. Of course the purpose is to catch them and get them punished as they deserve. Otherwise what is the point of doing what we do?” Like Imprint, I Saw Harassment and Against Harassment also regularly patrolled during festivities, in mixed-gender teams, recognizable through their vests or t-shirts. This “social police” expected to control the area and to intervene as soon as possible. They meant to claim safe spaces during particular moments of high risk for women, such as at crowded festivities. However, ensuring the safety of spaces in Cairo was never disconnected from giving information about the definitions of sexual harassment in the streets, dismantling victim-blaming, and raising social awareness of the crime.

Without necessarily asking the police for intervention, HarassMap explicitly supported the need to criminalize sexual harassment. The social media campaign “Harasser = Criminal” was launched by HarassMap in 2015. It was the first campaign to use the language of crime to address street sexual violence, and it was promoted in major media with a realistic video. The scene of harassment took place on a minibus, and represented the gazes and collaboration of the other passengers in bringing the harasser to justice. Setting the story in a space of urban transit frequented by many women in daily life, HarassMap attempted to sensitize viewers not only about the legal aspects of sexual violence and the importance of breaking silence, but also about the social responsibility of the community of bystanders in the acceptance of violence, as exemplified in the 2015 campaign, “The harasser is a criminal” (see also Abdelmonem 2015b). In this sense, social transformation was an ethical cultivation of public and collective embodiments that HarassMap hoped would create critical pressure on the state.

Criminalization took another form for Against Harassment. Nabil, a volunteer at HarassMap, started a new initiative using a different approach. He set up the Against Harassment page, where pictures and stories of harassers could be posted online. His attempt at crowdsourcing

tried to shame sexual harassers online, and aimed to encourage attacked women to press charges. After having organized “Eid without Harassment” volunteer patrols in 2013, he expanded the project to include a rehabilitation programme for male harassers. Nabil shared with Harassmap – the organization where he first developed – the principle of ending the social acceptance of sexual harassment and reforming the laws on sexual violence. However, he did not focus only on the traumatic experiences of the assaulted, support for whom was offered at Nazra with a resident psychologist and safe sessions for personal stories. Nor did he promote self-defence courses, as Christina did. His focus was on healing the “mental sickness” of harassers and rehabilitating them. One of the purposes of his initiative, later backed by Harvard University and the American University in Cairo, was to offer psychological support both to the assaulted and to harassers, to change their pattern of behaviour.

Nabil’s sanitizing narrative, insisting that harassers were “sick”, was unique among the groups and activists I met, but not in everyday life. He referred to violence as a “humanity issue”: rather than in a lack of knowledge about what sexual harassment is, the issue lay in twisted behaviour that needed help and correction. The sickness of masculinity as a moral and behavioural pathology was frequently referenced. The “bestly masculinity” discourse that circulated in 2013 is exemplified in one of Ganzeer’s illustration, which I saw even pasted onto a column outside the Ministry of the Interior. The illustration - a muscular masculine bust as a flipside of the bust of an imaginary aggressive creature - approached violence as part of an irrational masculinity, versus the healthy embodiment of masculine physical force expressed in individual conduct and socially valued (“Are *you* a man? Or an animal harasser?”).

The 2013 joint campaign for the UN initiative of 16 days against violence against women – which for the first time brought OpAntiSH, Tahrir Bodyguards, Nazra, EIPR and HarassMap together – also proposed a slogan targeting offenders: “fix it in your mind,” *sallaha fi dimaghak*. Muscles and manners were not the issue. The campaign specified the various linguistic expressions used to stigmatize women and the different ways of defining sexual violence (from rape to harassment). Imbued with the irony of political cartoonist Doaa El Adl, the vignettes informed female and male readers about sexual violence, and invited them to (self-)reflect from the points of view of male and female subjects.

Women’s own muscular strength and self-confidence were encouraged by self-defence classes, which spread from 2012 onwards in several locations in Cairo and in Egypt. At meetings open to women only – although the trainer could be a man or a woman – participants would learn the basics so as to move with awareness in the street. Such sessions represented a chance for feminine connections and reciprocal encouragement. Perrine Lachenal (2014) notes that the courses created the image of the low-income harasser lurking

in the dark, projecting the fear of informal communities in urban spaces. Susana Galàn (2016) notes instead that for the trainers and participants she met on WenDo courses, the most important feature was defeating embodiments of feminine passivity and feeling solidarity with other women. Galàn further argues that, like OpAntiSH, self-defence courses such as WenDo were subversive of the gender order. Transforming oneself certainly had the effect of transforming the way spaces, and other female and male bodies, were perceived, as Yasmine in Chapter IV recalled. It is debatable, however, whether the desire for order and safety was only subversive, or if on the many courses available it also had other consequences: placing responsibility for being “ready for the attack” on women; essentializing masculinity. This particular point was divisive among groups fighting street harassment and sexual violence. During the presentation of the 2013 joint campaign against violence against women, a member of Tahrir Bodyguards explained that they would also teach how to move in the streets in ways that would not attract attention. A member of OpAntiSH, who was translating for journalists and researchers at the back of the room, expressed her disagreement to the small group next to her, and stopped translating after hearing that remark. The suggestion engendered a female body conscious of the space around her, and of her own physical and emotional abilities to “control” herself and her situation by making herself invisible. Her body is a surface that blends with the urban walls and roads. Her sexual difference, her embodiments, her gender relations and her own affective space are deleted to make her safe in an overwhelmingly masculine city.

XII. Reciprocating the gaze: maps, comics, stories

Are initiatives on sexual harassment mapping the city and its borders differently? Although its online work was structured from the beginning as complementary to work on the ground, HarassMap was modelled in 2010 on Ushahidi, free software produced in Kenya in 2008 to map violence after the elections (see also Young 2014). HarassMap allows anonymous SMS reporting of violence to be processed synchronically on a free mapping system covering Cairo (and later Egypt), and has collected over 1,000 reports since January 2011. On the very first day, the website crashed because of the number of hits. The idea was to allow users to quickly upload their reports, which would be pinpointed in red on a map of the city. Users would receive an SMS offering contacts for further support. The higher the number of attacks in an area, the larger the red spot would become on screens. Micro-stories denouncing violence as soon as it happened highlighted for the teams where they could focus. The topographical record of gendered bodily violence in everyday life recorded the refusal to say silent: other assaulted women and men could be helped to understand that their experiences were not unique.

At the same time, the red map of the city would differently intertwine bodies and urban spaces of transit, modelling a topography – with a margin of inaccuracy – according to the gendered relations of violence in those places. Assaulted bodies were drawing other borders of the city, marked by safety and danger, and bypassing the institutional constraints of police reports (see Young 2014). Volunteers, users and future users co-construct a map of Cairo according to its violence. Critics of the map, such as Grove (2015), suggest that HarassMap risks offering objectifying measures to determine violence against women that erase other ways of mapping (for instance, of bodies reclaiming the streets). For Grove, these limits of policing might be used to justify the violent intervention of the state, as crowd-mapping is a technology of global security in urban environments. Undoubtedly, HarassMap gives a partial picture of the violence and movements happening in a city of almost 20 million citizens. However, given the already pervasive technologies of control used by the security apparatuses, the Egyptian state might perhaps possess other forms of crowd-mapping more functional for the purposes of repressing dissent.



Imprint's metro comic. 24th October 2015.¹⁴⁷

Born after the revolutionary days of 2011, and encouraged by the then-free activist Alaa Abd El Fattah, Imprint had a very strong urban focus on spaces of mobility: universities, central streets and metro stations were all spaces of action. It implemented volunteer recruitment and information campaigns across Cairo University and in the streets, such as at mass bike rides, and launched patrolling teams on the metro. The group engages with gender in shared public spaces of transit, both patrolling and informing. When I met Zahra, one of the founders, she told me that they were careful about whom to approach and which “gaze” to look at: “In fact we do not intervene if they seem to enjoy that. It happens that we get on board of a train, and that we find that some girls are laughing at some comments. What should I do? I am not

¹⁴⁷ Source: Photo courtesy of Imprint. <https://www.facebook.com/Imprint.Movement.eg/photos/a.134049646732799.23875.134042453400185/604928142978278>. Last access: 5th December 2015.

going to stop that.” Her reference to mixed carriages relates to the institutional solution provided to make women safer on public transport: dedicated women-only trains, not available after 10 pm under the implicit assumption that respectable women do not ride the metro after that time.¹⁴⁸ Like HarassMap and other smaller initiatives, Imprint does not engage with gender segregation on the trains.

The campaign launched in winter 2015 showed the group’s ambition to reach a wider audience, in line with the efforts of collaborative campaigns and with HarassMap campaigns. It used panels of comics in metro stations to explain to (male) readers what harassment is from a woman’s point of view, and what can be done in daily life. Visual campaigns have been a cost-effective and practical manner to expand the audience while targeting specific events or places. In a busy and popular site like a metro station, where many cases of sexual harassment happen daily, compelling images and stories have a narrative power which may be more affectively incisive than a slogan. Comics as an activist strategy are not a new phenomenon, and in the explosion of Cairo’s artistic scene since 2012 new spaces for local comic artists – the magazine *Tok Tok*, the up-and-coming publishing group Autostrade, the comic book *Foot ’alena bokra* (Pass by Tomorrow) – have encouraged the emergence of comics about gender issues and feminist perspectives. In 2013 the online comic strip *Qahera – the Superhero, Not the City* gained great attention with its black-and-white *hijabi* superhero. Qahera would creatively and assertively intervene against harassment, in a crumbling city and in the total absence of security. Similarly, in 2014 Nazra started publication of a new quarterly comic, *Al-shakmagiya* (The Treasure Box), specifically dedicated to women’s rights and feminist themes.

Basma’s comic tries to present the difficult life choices of a woman who feels that her body is a thin foil between “her soul” and the gaze. Showing the female character hesitating over which outfit to choose, the campaign points out how an objectifying gaze enters into the minute choices of daily life. According to the director of Basma, Abdel Fattah Al Sharkawy, they try to connect the actual lack of connection between dress code and harassment to an everyday story.¹⁴⁹ The gaze that Basma scrutinizes is mostly that of the potential harasser: their training focuses on how to intercept, thwart and catch men. In the comics, this set of strategies also includes the individual bystander, who – through a compelling explanation – is enabled to understand women’s position better. Thus the issue they seem to focus on is that harassment

¹⁴⁸ Gender segregation as a safety measure, which essentializes violence as masculine and protection as a requirement for female bodies, is an argument advanced by the most conservative groups in Egypt. It was proposed again by the Nour Party in 2013. Many of my interviewees joined or organized public demonstrations, like Neama.

¹⁴⁹ Mada Masr and Dalia Rabie. “Comics in Cairo metro stations rail against sexual harassment.” *Mada Masr*. 26th October 2015. <http://www.madamasr.com/news/comics-cairo-metro-stations-rail-against-sexual-harassment>. Last access: 5th December 2015.

is perpetuated by those who ignore the reality of what women actually suffer, reflected on the surfaces of their bodies and in their more invisible suffering. An empathetic understanding similarly inspired viral videos such as UN Women in Egypt's 2013 *In Her Shoes*,¹⁵⁰ intended to show to the male gaze why harassment should stop. A male actor, Waleed Hammad, filmed what it is like for a woman to walk in Cairo by dressing himself as a veiled woman and hiding the camera. Similar videos, shot in New York and Paris, seemed to suggest that if men experienced the same level of sexual harassment as women did, they would neither do it nor blame it on women. Empathy would make them perceive the borders of fragile safe space on their bodies. Is harassment then only a lack of information that – once filled – will assure women the right to bodily integrity? Are men in the dark about violence and abuse, which they suffer too? It is the combination of action and visual messages (as also in Skalli 2014) that has allowed Basma/Imprint and HarassMap to sustain their work for so long (Tadros 2015).

The invitation to create “safe cities free of harassment” by addressing the potential gaze of bystanders – not only of harassers, or of the checkpoints at the gates – and targeting the social acceptance of sexual violence makes the difference for Rania, Hala and Galila, all members of HarassMap. It is the gaze they particularly target in campaigns and on the ground, beside the gaze of women and survivors. During all the HarassMap events I attended, and during interviews with three of its members, the core message of the organization was consistent on this point. The bystanders are essential in proving that sexual violence in the streets is unacceptable, especially as the police may not be the best option. Besides offering support by SMS to the targeted women and encouraging them to break the silence, HarassMap is especially careful to engage third parties: shop owners and people who live in the neighbourhood; passengers on the bus. The sense of local community calls on the gaze of (mostly male) viewers to prevent impunity and stop violence against women. The community will then engender a safe space.

However, it is the targeted women themselves, through pages and private messages, that break their own walls of punishment. Several harassed women started sharing information and pictures of offenders in a sort of “public shaming” practice which bypassed the police. The personal experiences and wounds of attacked women circulated freely, both online and through artistic expressions in Cairo – such as with the “Dayra” public storytelling event Nazra created in 2014, and with the Bussy storytelling meetings. A few survivors – such as photographer Rena Effendi – willingly posted pictures of themselves after attacks, or – like

¹⁵⁰ “Egypt PSA: put yourself in her shoes, instead of finding ways to blame her.” YouTube video, 1:15. Posted by UN Women. 9th December 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=71&v=jePvXFz4XDc. Last access: 4th June 2015.

photographer Eman Helal – pictures of the hurt bodies of women, together with stories of violence, as “testimony” on social media.¹⁵¹ Yet these are more than simple testimonies or witness statements collected for a report.

Such actions – painful and graphic – form on the one hand a sort of private criminalization and punishment, out of exasperation with the constraints placed on proving abuse, for which there is a more open space on social media. Drawing the gaze to the offender can also be a response to the lack of privacy of the targeted women, whose details and pictures are published by the mass media as a way to further increase their stigma and to grant the state the status of protector of moral norms¹⁵²: the shaming of oppressors passes through pictures of the offended body and the criminal body. Personal stories form intimate bridges with communities of solidarity, with the enormous number of other survivors (see also Skalli 2014). In this sense, women (and men) who denounce violence verbally and visually are “translating” violence while also making their own legitimate voices heard.

Organizations also adopt similar strategies, encouraging the sharing of personal stories of sexual harassment and violence. On the HarassMap online platform, short messages can accompany the locations sent by users and add more information. On their blog, personal opinions about sexual harassment are shared at greater length. The 2014 campaign was entirely focused on the concept of not staying silent. In a similar manner, the Uprising of Women in the Arab World, which stopped updating its website in 2013 but continues to share information about violence against women on its Facebook page, collected about 60 stories of gender abuse from different countries in the region. Nazra collected personal stories in a report, and introduced a series of safe meetings especially focused on personal stories of gender-based violence.

A personal choice to expose what it means to survive with and through a pain that is both personal and social adds another layer to what Skalli (2014) has identified as the crucial role of social media for young Egyptian women’s groups against sexual harassment. Asking for a gaze on the intimacy of pain – unafraid of seeing blood and bruises – women attempted to create a community by showing how violence tears a female body (and a society) apart. Demanding a reciprocity of gazes has been fruitful: after Christina fell into depression, it was watching Noha

¹⁵¹ “Testimony from an assaulted OpAntiSH member.” OpAntiSH Facebook page. 25th January 2013. <https://www.facebook.com/notes/op-anti-sexual-harassmentassault/testimony-from-an-assaulted-opantish-member-january-25th-2013>. Last access: 15th March 2015. See also Chapter IV.

¹⁵² The same practice targeted LGBTQ groups in 2001 for the Queen Boat case (Pratt 2007), and from 2015 onwards (see note 72).

Rushdy on TV, telling her story without sparing any details, that helped her and made her feel less lonely. She felt someone out there could understand her: she left her home again. The thought of being an inspiration, and of having been inspired by other feminist activists, helped Malika, one of the survivors of the political violence in Tahrir discussed in Chapter IV, and supports her speaking activities.

This sense of solidarity is primarily affective. It feeds on the resilience within vulnerability, rather than on a tactical embodiment. It is not defensive. The wounded and recovered body multiplies the safe spaces within the city, offline and online. The bodies of the female survivors (both during political protests and in everyday life) draw out the gendered contradictions in the sexual rhetoric of the nation – not only in its repression, but also in the understanding of its social reproduction. Sexual violence shakes the discrepancies in the nation's borders. In the bodies of women, in the open of the city, violence brings out not only how the nation is feminized as a woman – the army wife, the bearer of pain – but also what it is not in the flesh (see Aretxaga 2005: 87). It is not a safe female body; it is not an accountable dominant male body.

Constructing themselves as challenging survivors, the women that denounced sexual violence and spoke of their experiences publicly intercepted the gaze of other women watching – and brought them together – gaining a wide audience. It is perhaps a refashioning of the dramas of nationhood which Lila Abu-Lughod explored (2005). New narratives of gendered subjectification, moral learning and embodiment emerge today in a context of sexual violence against women. Between traditional media and social media, graphic stories and symbols engender communities that question the limits of the nation as a woman and the meaning of horrific sexual violence in its urban spaces.

XIII. From closed communities to shared spaces

In advertisements for gated communities, social reproduction and order are often linked to the luxury of reproductive labour. Compounds are represented as safe spaces in a stressful city, where couples, families and children happily enjoy their time. Tidy landscapes are implicitly compared with the joint disorder of bodies and spaces outside the wall, which linger like ghosts.

Although this image is at odds with the everyday life experiences of the majority, the privatization of safety is one with the violent gendered contradictions that are construed and experienced in Cairo as a whole. Violence becomes part of the reproductive duties – material and affective – demanded of women. Acting against sexual harassment without reinforcing moral discourses of protection/victimization or exonerating the state of its responsibilities and

gains is complicated by the implicit recognition that women need to bear the weight of violence for the nation-state to carry on.

The latest joint campaign by HarassMap, Nazra, Basma and the Anti-Sexual Harassment Unit at Cairo University to fight violence against women, launched in autumn 2015, is especially meaningful in the emphasis it puts on shared spaces and gender. Named “One square metre”, it represented “the square and its opposite”, meaning both the rigid and squared space of stereotypes within Egyptian society, which violently target women, and the material and identitary space where “the body, property, thoughts, feelings and secrets” are all included in their different facets, outside given boundaries. The campaign focused on “the freedom to choose who has the right to break through it” (Nazra 2015). Social and political economical boundaries to eliminate violence against women were placed here in a close relationship with the rights to privacy and integrity, and with the liberty to open up personal spaces to others without fearing for one’s life. As Rabia, a creative team member at Nazra, commented when we met in 2013:

We need safe spaces... spaces where people can trust each other. When we had some meetings, where people could express themselves and talk about their stories, there was this girl ... She was veiled, and she came to us through a Facebook post. She told us that she was a believer, but that she felt attracted to women and that she did not know where to go and share this. I was very afraid for her. She was so open. But... I don’t know, I mean, she really trusted us... I would think, who are those who listen to you? Who knows them? This is what makes me feel that we need many more safe spaces.

Rabia’s reflection on the gender and sexuality discrimination that stands in the way of safety reveals that places and bodies in Cairo are imbued with sexual differences. The danger of violence reveals that the communal spaces of the nation are not communal after all – not by law, not by social environment. They are dispossessed and constantly fought for. The anxiety that surrounds the family model of militarized nationalism – interpreted by the president and his women (see Chapter III), and by the family aspirations of private urban developments – implies that women will carry on silently coping with violence and supporting unity, within the family and the nation. Reclaiming one square metre therefore means decoupling violence from this understanding of social reproduction, while also affirming sexual differences and non-conformity as a common space of places, stories and bodies.

As with the recent mockery of the local tourist campaign #thisisEgypt – which used the tag to prove (with human rights abuses, or rubbish on the roads) that Egypt was not merely a postcard country – violence reveals the borders of what Egypt, and in particular Cairo, is not (see also Aretxaga 2005). It is not a woman speaking of violence through her sexual difference,

or of the recognition of her assault; nor is it the streets of communal living or the spaces of security corporations. Cairenes' initiatives, ranging across the more or less radical and political, demand a different kind of safety as potentially socially constructed and shared, not dispossessed and commercialized. By remapping the city (and the country) in its spaces of violence and safety, they challenge the violent social reproduction of the patriarchal nation-state through urban spaces and bodies.

XIV. Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to show how in Cairo safety and order have become a commodity and a moral imperative, constructed upon gender and class hierarchies of oppression that materially and symbolically divide the city. With a high level of sexual violence in public areas, the selective securitization of the city has become a way to accumulate capital from national land. This process appreciates sexual bodies and spaces together, valuing them according to their potential for social reproduction. By using the discourse of safety against "out-of-control" subjects in the city, such as low-income young men, and participating in the development of large suburban areas, the state and other apparatuses encourage and profit from the privatization of safety.

The commodification of private protection, which has passed from a right to a privilege, is part of existing practices and institutional structures of order, criminalization and body policing. The police leave daily violence unpunished, as a continuous feminization of the nation, while abusing harassed women – among other subjects – without fear of punishment. The state abandons its welfare and safety responsibilities for its population, and largely ignores legal demands concerning violence unless they are propaganda-led. Drawing on Silvia Federici (2004) and Deniz Kandiyoti (2014), I have argued that violence against women is tolerated and encouraged by the capitalist state in order to avoid direct confrontation over its masculinist status quo. A regime of impunity preserves the accumulation granted by social reproduction and state-private investment, and safeguards the hegemonic masculine privileges of the military nation-state.

Sexual harassment and violence against women is a relevant element in the borders created by state-led privatization and the distribution of violence and security. Because of the centrality of sexual harassment in public debate and everyday life, bodies and/as space of contention are the fields upon which young groups of activists in Cairo act and strategize, both online and offline. Anti-harassment initiatives variously articulate the rights to bodily integrity and safe space, while demanding a close gaze at survivors and sexual harassers. These groups operate by emphasizing porous borders: between bodies and the spaces where they are under attack;

between masculinities and femininities; between laws, institutions and social trust. They ambivalently explore gendered spaces and bodies, as formations which are negotiated communally in a divided city, and which challenge its patriarchal economy of violence.

CHAPTER VI

TIMES OF AN EGYPTIAN FEMINIST LIFE: KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND THE AFFECTIVE LABOUR OF ACTIVISM

I. Introduction

I.i Politics and knowledge

In a branch of a Zamalek bookshop chain in 2013, in the section dedicated to books by and about women from Egypt and the Middle East – novels, academic books, biographies in both English and Arabic – fresh copies of *Sex and the Citadel* by Shereen El Feki covered a table. On its cream and fuchsia cover, the title and illustration were catchy but puzzling. Other books in the same bookshop – art books, in particular, with paintings of naked human bodies and sexual allusions – had been censored with removable black tape. Such was not the case with this book. Was it a *Sex and the City* for post-revolutionary Cairo? Or was it a contemporary take on Alifa Rifaat's short story *Distant View of a Minaret*?

Neither of my assumptions was correct. The book was presented as the fruit of ten years of research in different countries in North Africa and the Middle East, with a particular focus on El Feki's country of origin, Egypt. The results, addressing a general readership rather than academics, aimed to show how changing understandings of sex are socially reshaping the MENA countries where the author conducted her interviews.¹⁵³ It was not her thesis, though, that made me reflect. I better understood the cultural and political implications of why and how that book, and similar books by extension, mattered when I happened to meet one of her interviewees. Farida, a very young radical feminist working for an anti-censorship organization and in the process of establishing a new feminist collective, started our meeting by remarking that she had been refusing interviews since reading how her words and experience had been reworked in the book:

I have to tell you this. I don't do interviews and I hate it... I was badly used years ago, once, by this Egyptian American¹⁵⁴ ... She is the one whose book was published recently. I met her just like, going with the gang of the revolution in Tahrir Square; she was a friend of a friend. And she wanted to interview me. I was working with Nawal El Saadawi at the time, and she made this interview. Then the recorder was off and we were talking about normal things, and she published that in her book. And seriously...

¹⁵³ Shereen El Feki is now a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex. See her piece: "Sex and the Citadel." *The Guardian*. 15th November 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/nov/15/sex-citadel-shereen-el-feki-guardian-first-book-award, 2013>. Last access: 15th March 2016.

¹⁵⁴ El Feki is actually Welsh-Egyptian, raised in Canada and educated in the UK.

it was terrible [...]. It is of the same [kind] of Mona El Tahawy,¹⁵⁵ those propagandas, and it furthers [further supports] for the American society and how orientalist it is... She did not make my story anonymous. She sent to me the form so I can approve [it], and she added lots of things... just to make the book smooth. She was talking about Marwa Rakha¹⁵⁶ and Mona El Tahawy, and she wanted to say that all of us [feminist interviewees] are agreeing that these are the best feminists in Egypt. The chapter is terrible... she introduces this terrible person talking about sexuality and about homosexuality as a disease [she laughs], and she was saying that this is a wonderful sample of our society about sexual awareness... and she would say that Mubarak was a feminist! [She laughs.] It is so wrong.

Farida's anger is articulated through an inextricable ensemble of reasons which are at once personal and collective as well as ethical, cultural and political. She has ethical concerns, since her name was published in relation to ideas she claims not to have agreed to share, or which simply were not her ideas at all, but with which readers would identify her. She highlights crucial ideological differences: she did not support El Tahawy's feminism or writings (perceived as supportive of cultural imperialism and mainstream orientalism) or Rakha's work. Farida's "I" merges with the collective "we" of other feminists that she feels have been misrepresented: she disagrees as a whole with El Feki's stance and writings on feminism in Egypt, describing them as misleading and plain "wrong". As partial and dismissive as Farida's reading of *Sex and the Citadel* may be, the radicalism of her secular feminist life in Cairo seemed to me at odds with the thesis of the book, which El Feki, reiterated in a recent article:

The most successful of these initiatives [on sexuality] are keenly aware that change in the Arab region comes not from confrontation, such as FEMEN-style baring of breasts, but through negotiation, along the grain of religion and culture. In essence, we are talking about a sexual evolution, not revolution. (El Feki 2015: 42)

The painful treachery Farida perceived, and her feeling of misrepresentation, is constructed in her words in terms of an exploitation of who she was, of what she thought and lived as a feminist – one who believed in revolution, not simply evolution – and of an entire milieu where

¹⁵⁵ Mona El Tahawy is an American-Egyptian journalist and commentator on gender in the Middle East. She gained particular fame with her controversial opinion piece on foreign policy, "Why do you hate us?" published in 2012, the opening of which quoted Alifa Rifaat's short story. In the article she described Arab men, and by extension Arab countries, as inherently oppressive and hateful towards women. In 2012 El Tahawy defined herself as a "secular, radical feminist Muslim". See: Yasmine El Rashidi. "Mona El Tahawy." *Bidoun* 28. 2012. <http://bidoun.org/issues/28-interviews#mona-elthahawy>. Last access: 15th March 2016.

¹⁵⁶ Marwa Rakha is an Egyptian marketing teacher and Montessori educator who works as a relationship consultant. As well as having her own slots on radio (Nile FM) and TV (OnTV), she has published a book about relationships and several articles in various Egyptian magazines and on her blog, both in English and in Arabic. Marwa Rakha defined herself in 2010 as not feminist, although "feminists are good people." See her blog post: "Campus magazine: I am not a feminist!" 1st April 2010. <http://marwarakha.com/?p=4083>. Last access: 15th March 2016.

other voices were speaking. I encountered similar reactions among other young feminists I met when they mentioned previous interviews. Malak, for instance, a radical young activist and Farida's friend, recalled – gesturing rapidly with her lit cigarette – that she felt exhausted by the many journalists that contacted her, who often wanted to objectify her experience as a predetermined “Egyptian woman”: “How do you feel in the street: what question is that? Go there and see it by yourself.” In a similar way, Rabia, a creative member of Nazra, laughed that although she received many requests for meetings, she did not accept any of them.

Farida's power over her misrepresented experiences and identity was first expressed as a complaint full of rage and mistrust while she was having a Nescafe with me, another researcher. It was also an admonition, I felt, although I had been positively introduced to her by two other young activists. In Malak's and Rabia's cases, the choice of whom to share with and what to share was described and enacted as part of their agency and identity, charged with dissatisfaction but also some humour. The three of them had all “learnt” how to move in the field of “making knowledge”, which made them both suspicious and conscious of its power webs and legacies.

Such troubled knowledge production about women and feminism resonates with the critiques of the feminist “problem of speaking for others” and the politics of Western and non-Western feminists (Mohanty 1988; Alcoff 1991). Neither a subject nor an object of their own knowledge, Egyptian women – and women activists in particular – would often be transformed into a symbolic ground on which the positions of interlocutors – political figures, writers or journalists – could stand in a hierarchy of power. There was more at stake than being caught in a dynamic as sought-after “service providers”, as Mona Abaza¹⁵⁷ emphasizes in a controversial piece about Western academics in Egypt. Abaza underlines how the international division of academic work constructs local researchers and informants as servants of better-funded, privileged Western academics framed as knowing subjects. The enactment of unequal power relations led to claims of authority over trendy topics to do with the revolution, in order to spend this knowledge on the academic and information market. Undoubtedly, on the global information market – but also in the local popular media and daily consumption landscape – activism after January 2011 became a very valuable currency through which to refashion oneself, and possibly to move upwards socially. As the stream of books about Egyptian women and activism showed, the revolution and its later development occupied a stable market position alongside novels, magazines about conservative clothing and books on self-improvement. As the future was too uncertain to imagine clearly, and the cards of the present

¹⁵⁷ Mona Abaza. “Academic tourists sight-seeing the Arab Spring.” *Al Ahram*. 26th September 2011. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/22373.aspx>. Last access: 8th May 2016.

were being reshuffled, many were trying to define their positions as commentators on what would come next for Egypt.

But in the highly and inescapably politicized context of everyday life in Cairo, the choice of my three interviewees not to be interviewed disrupted any simplistic interpretation of women's and feminist activism in Egypt – as passive, as attention-seeking or as a new phenomenon – or in transnational circuits. As much as articles and books on women were being published, women activists were being censored and attacked in Egypt. The words Farida chose, as well as Malak and Rabia's missing answers, escape easy labelling. They do not fit the "activist" discourses constructed for them: they remain at the margins of mainstream cultural and often political narratives because of the non-conformity of their position, locally and transnationally. As a challenge that went against the grain of what a "feminist" activist is – and also of what a politics of feminist knowledge locally and transnationally can be – the three of them chose to voice their lives and their ideas about the past and future from a different place.

1.ii The affective workings of memory: beyond speakability

Introduced by Farida, Malak and Rabia's consciousness of the validity of their own knowledge and by their affects with regard to the cultural politics of "Egyptian feminism", this chapter seeks to explore some of the complexities that feminist and women's activists raised in Egypt by means of knowledge production. As I will try to show, post-2011 feminist production could be understood at the nexus, on the one hand, of mainstream cultural production (codified through certain tropes, well-known popular figures and/or new avenues, such as street art and digital archives) and, on the other hand, of the gendered cultural politics of emotion (which reveals the nation-state in its affective materialities and representations: icons, sentiments attached to certain objects). The prism I use to look at such complexities and ambiguities is one that relates to affects – in particular mnemonic affects – elicited by moments of strong political consciousness and identification: nostalgia, grief, care and hope.

Nostalgia, pain and hope were not only a way to express experiential moments within feminist activism. They structured and validated often-ineffable gendered experiences, in a historical moment characterized by selective erasures in the gendering of post-2011 nationalism. While personal accounts generally rendered activism almost self-evident, and needed no explanation at times during the interviews I collected, they were thoroughly suffused with powerful affects that pointed to what could not be described in words alone. Such accounts of knowledge on the one hand transcended the individuality of personal experience, and on the other touched on the limits of speakability. There is an incommensurable affective power of a larger world

that words are won by. Narratives (personal and nationalist) let us glimpse this power, as audience reactions show, but so too do visual works and gestures.

Judith Butler has theorized how discourses produce social relations between speaking subjects, such that “to move outside of the domain of speakability is to risk one’s status as a subject” (Butler 1997: 133). Similarly, Joan Scott has argued that experience is also within discourse (Scott 1991). The feminist epistemology that I observed in Cairo and online pushed the limits of speakability in the sense that verbal discourses were not the only material with which feminist and women activists nurtured their consciousness. Symbolic, affective and bodily knowledge were part of it, profoundly intertwined. In it, sexuality, gender expectations, metaphors and words, transnational circuits and national fantasy were not separate but integral to the project of decolonizing feminism.

As a tool of consciousness and social shifts – in the face of the neoliberal logic of the market, militarism and authoritarian patriarchy – making feminist knowledge is an especially decolonizing tool that carries on the struggles against the colonial take on women. This is not to say that these women exclusively twisted mainstream erasures and counteracted mnemonic practices, that mnemonic practices are necessarily feminist, or that these were the only feminists producing knowledge in Egypt. Their engagement, however, can offer a richer picture of the decolonizing politics embedded in knowledge production about women in the Middle East.

Feminist groups’ and women activists’ interest in knowledge production is therefore meant here as a material interest not only in remaking the nation, but also in remaking the gendered fantasy of the nation-state that feeds marginalization and erasure in society at large. I take decolonizing as belonging to the project outlined by Maria Lugones (2010). Lugones sees in decolonizing gender a group praxis where “the decolonial feminist’s task begins by her seeing the colonial difference, emphatically resisting her epistemological habit of erasing it” (Lugones 2010: 753). By resisting the erasure of other ontological grounds, I interpret decolonizing feminism epistemologically: as a praxis that captures and contests erased memories and thriving fantasies of the nation, which grow and expand in gendered terms. As a part of a feminist project, decolonizing knowledge is therefore a praxis that tries to grow different worlds, including affective worlds – their objects, symbolic order and material/digital places of memory.

II. Another fantasy of the nation- state

A number of studies in the literature on nationalism in the Middle East deal with the nationalist fabrication of memories and memorials – articulated between individual subjects, public sites and the global circulation of knowledge.¹⁵⁸ The contention around remembrance – as a social process of constructing common experiences – and the selective articulation of particular events in the Egyptian history – January 2011, March 2011 and June 2013 – are similarly analysed here. I draw on Laleh Khalili's definition of commemoration as public practices constituted by forms and narrative contents (Khalili 2005: 5). In this way I examine strategies which are outside institutional practices and sites of remembering, and which function amid erasures. They are practices, stories and fantasies where visions of the future, images of the past and attachment to the nation are forged together.

In anthropological research that deals with the nation-state, affects and materiality, Yael Navaro-Yashin's ethnography of the materialities of affects in Turkish-Greek Cyprus is an inspiration (Navaro-Yashin 2012), as is Sara Ahmed's and Begona Aretxaga's work on political affects (Ahmed 2004; Aretxaga 1997, 2005). Rather than focusing on social structures and material objects that substitute for a missing presence (i.e. remembering the dead, or memorial sites), I look at the significance of living through a strained memory, where disappearing activists and forgotten forms of participation coexist with nostalgic market commodities. The narratives that envelop objects, sites and bodies in webs of meaning fill in the gendered erasures that were once presences.

Erasures emerge more strikingly in simultaneity with women making their presence more visible. Yet they do not concern visibility alone. They also relate to the epistemic and affective presence women and femininities feel and represent, since the strength of nationhood is mobilized through militarized gender relations that mostly address women as military wives.¹⁵⁹ The selective forgetting and remembering of women's activism and engagement – when these are not explicitly under attack – seems to inscribe women's experiences as a dangerous repository for the gendered nation: they destroy the happiness of the nation and its future social reproduction. Women's and feminist knowledge production works on what Sara Ahmed (2010), speaking of feminism and queerness, defines as "sore points" (Ahmed 2010: 201). Ahmed relates the effects and cause of the soreness to a feminist attachment to collective and individual memory. The attachment to their memories I encountered among many young

¹⁵⁸ See for instance Navaro-Yashin (2002) on Kemalism in Turkey; Barsalou (2012) on memorialization in post-Mubarak Egypt; Khalili (2005) on Palestinian movements; Slyomovics (1998) on the Israel-Palestine village of Ein Houd/Ein Hod.

¹⁵⁹ See Chapter III.

Egyptian women activists was somehow an injury to the masculinist turn of the nation, and was a symptom of their melancholia.

This is further underlined by the ambiguity of the state, driven by the unexhausted force of the fantasy of it (Navaro-Yashin 2002; also Aretxaga 2000). If we assume that an unconscious, non-rational power supports state formation – that “fantasy does the everyday job for the state” (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 5) – then conscious and unconscious memories – especially collective and public memories – cannot be separated from the processes of the cultural construction of the nation.

III. The erasure of memories and the preoccupation of knowledge

From my early days in Cairo in October 2012 onwards, the revolution remained an object of steady consumption. Revolution-named foods and restaurants were waning, but books, clothing and graffiti (from the graffiti kits sold at central bookshops to private and public workshops,¹⁶⁰ including some for mothers and children¹⁶¹) represented the commodification of slogans and practices that had affected the lives of millions a year and a half before. Their echoes – amid a new flood of paraphernalia, often inspired either by the colours of the national flag or by popular characters such as Mickey Mouse, V for Vendetta and SpongeBob – could still be heard in 2013 in the waves of protest against President Morsy.

With declining statistics on the quality of education, which ranked Egypt as one of the lowest countries (WEFR Report 2014–2015¹⁶²), and the flourishing of private classes and private institutions,¹⁶³ squares and shops were spaces for learning how to live and consume communally as an Egyptian. The experience of protests between 2011 and 2013 formed a collective memory for the majority of Egyptians across generations, but especially for the young, who until then had felt only marginally part of the history that gazed out at them from

¹⁶⁰ In May 2013 the Ministry of Culture initiated a series of graffiti workshops for artists. The initiative did not meet with the favour of established street artists, as during the workshops it was not possible to use “offensive terms”: thus the anti-censorship character of street art was erased. See: Marwa Amer. “Is the writing on the wall for Cairo’s graffiti workshops?” *BBC News*. 15th May 2013. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-22453213>. Last access: 15th March 2016.

¹⁶¹ I refer to a “Mommy & Me” day organized in March 2013 by Kidville Palm Hills, a recreation and education centre in a Palm Hills compound in 6th October. The day included several bonding activities for mothers and children, including a graffiti session. See the Facebook event at <https://www.facebook.com/events/292694230858521/>. Last access: 15th March 2016.

¹⁶² WEF Global Competitive Report 2014–2015. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GlobalCompetitivenessReport_2014-15.pdf. Last access: 20th January 2016.

¹⁶³ Pasha Magid. “Phantom schools.” *Mada Masr*. 14th January 2015. <http://www.madamasr.com/en/2015/01/14/feature/society/phantom-schools>. Last access: 20th January 2016.

books and monuments. The intimacy of bodies, affects and memories in the protests intersected with gender, class, religion, disability, race and age. It constituted the matter of imagining alternative possibilities that challenged the status quo. Forgetting was thus a particularly precious element in the construction of political and social meanings.

In activist Alaa Abd El Fattah's last letter from Tora prison, concerning the increasing "battle of narratives" to manipulate opinions and strategies, this connection is particularly evident:

I try to remember what it was like when tomorrow seemed so full of possibility and my words seemed to have the power to influence (if only slightly) what that tomorrow would look like. I can't really remember that... But one thing I do remember, one thing I know: the sense of possibility was real.¹⁶⁴ (Abd El Fattah 2016)

Alaa, like other activists imprisoned or killed,¹⁶⁵ has been erased from public view, confined in a space of invisibility and almost unspeakability, from where only memories and affective relations can prove his existence. Somewhere else, in central Cairo, celebrations continue to be held; El Sisi posters resist the dusty winds; but the prison cell simultaneously reveals and conceals its inmates to and from those outside, and vice versa. This process indicates not only the mutability of memory, but also the permanence of the structures (i.e. photographic memorials, celebratory days and concrete walls) that allow its selective preservation across time and change. While his words position imagination in relation to the enormous power of memory, the workings of memory are the form that came to structure the rearticulation of the gendered nation-state between 2011 and the post-2013 period, and upon which activists acted.

As I mentioned in Chapter III, a first effect implies that the cultural construction of political change in 2013 could not be prepared without attaching affects and meanings to familiar past experiences. Bifo Berardi (2011) comments, from a Marxist perspective, that in the current era of capitalism, "the main feature of commodity production is cognitive labor, the labor of attention, memory, language and imagination" (Berardi 2011: 107).¹⁶⁶ I would go even further: in Egypt the relationship between mnemonic and bodily erasures does not lie in a rationally

¹⁶⁴ Robin Yassin-Kassab et al. "'I was terribly wrong' – writers look back at the Arab spring five years on." *The Guardian*. 23rd January 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/23/arab-spring-five-years-on-writers-look-back>. Last access: 27th April 2016.

¹⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch has counted 7,420 civilians arrested, tortured and tried in military courts since 2014, in addition to tens of thousands of prisoners. See "Egypt: 7,400 civilians tried in military courts." *HRW*. 13th April 2016. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/13/egypt-7400-civilians-tried-military-courts>. Last access: 27 April 2016.

¹⁶⁶ Bifo Berardi understands the exploitation of cognitive labour in terms of the introduction of automation into the mode of production; I would extend this to the mode of social reproduction (i.e. in set times and spaces for consumption and leisure: see Chapter IV).

planned, fully conscious and directly effective technology of control (although this may exist). It is rather the subject of a fantasy of excess, as beautifully articulated by Begona Aretxaga: “Fantasy is not meant as a purely illusory construction but as a form of reality in its own right, a scene whose structure traverses the boundaries between the conscious and the unconscious” (Aretxaga 2005: 106). Not only is forgetting neither entirely coherent nor exclusively economic, but it is also part of a deeper substrate invested with political power that supports the authoritarian nation-state and enables its survival and economic opacity.

As January 2011 faded away, and new protests accompanied its remembering and reworking,¹⁶⁷ the “loving” post-coup country was also being (re)founded on a growing number of absences and unclaimed deaths, on disappearing subjects and denied memories, and on visible (but unclaimed) acts of violence. The Egyptian nation-state materialized as a ghostly presence that could intervene randomly and without accountability to maintain (heterosexual) order, and that simultaneously was and was not there. With no clear culprit, the deaths and disappearances became uncanny (see Aretxaga 2005: 136).

The uncanny was invested with intimacy in Egypt, parallel to gendered romantic nationalism. The bodies of the dead (terrorists, spies, prisoners, protesters), even when effaced, disappeared or unnamed, could be anyone close to us: a neighbour, a researcher, a street seller, an activist who may have shared with us the space of the protesting square or a common life. This proximity, of experiences and flesh, shook with terror and doubt as it proved the trembling fragility of political categories and the senselessness of their actions.

Early in the post-revolutionary period, women activists had already experienced political erasures and uncanny agencies, as I have described in previous chapters on political violence and the lack of credibility accorded to experiences of harassment. The violent attacks during the women’s march of 8th March, a few weeks after Hosny Mubarak stepped down, were a signal: the silence about and denial of women’s contributions and demands were being brought to light in all their complexity. Erased and dismissed, women activists’ experience and knowledge continued in the affective certainty that matters, bodies and events may no longer be but had not ceased to exist, albeit at a different level. Their experiences may have been disbelieved and repressed, but they could still give pain or joy. In structuring experiences and strategies around remembering and imagining “absent” practices that were central to nationalist and cultural production, young women activists’ cultural, political and personal memories attempted to rework the uncertain boundaries between past and future.

¹⁶⁷ The crucial affective vividness of the memory of the revolution was used politically during the election of President El Sisi: see Chapter II.

IV. Between digital archives and performances about the women of the revolution

At each protest, temporary displays of revolutionary drawings would be set up and installed – sometimes at the corner of the square, sometimes as complex DIY installations carried on the backs of the protestors, sometimes on fliers – opening up the stories that were implicit in the waving flags and signs of political parties. These creative vignettes, often handwritten, constituted a temporary museum, mutable and ephemeral. The improvised displays of “museums” – from articulated bodily extensions to vernacular architectural structures – contrasted with the destruction of the existing museums in Cairo. During the days of the revolution (and later, with the attacks in the summer of 2013), archaeological artefacts that were relevant to the historical memory of Egypt had been looted or destroyed by bombs.

Pictures of martyrs occupied a particular position in the displays. At the police stations and in institutional palaces such as the Ministry of the Interior, small photographs of officers and police who had died during the revolution would be collected on neat, striking wall posters: this was their place as martyrs, permanently remembered with a rare sense of orderliness by the state’s greatest bureaucracies. With a much greater emphasis and explosion of creativity, the temporary museums that sprang up during protests showed pictures of revolutionary martyrs whose bodies had succumbed – partly or entirely – to the violence of repression. It never occurred to me, however, to look for women among those pictures. Female faces only rarely appeared in street artworks of a political or social character: wounded, suffering, fierce-looking, like in the street art about the Maspero attacks in November 2011, but not martyrs.

Women’s pain, deaths and severe assaults remained deeply buried underneath masculine pains: their preoccupations could be manifested as the weeping mother, worried about her martyred male children but carrying on working for the survival of the nation. With artistic inflections from the pharaonic past, murals usually positioned women as part of a maternal nationalism, depicting lower-income mothers’ steadfastness. The weight of the cooking gas the women are carrying in the mural reproduced below is the living weight of those they feed and care for; of their survival, until the mother-nation tragically reclaims them; of their life after death as martyrs in Egypt.

The sexualization of pain differentiated between the discourses of masculine and feminine sacrifice and the pain of the nation, as well as between the masculine and feminine expression of their affects. The theme of the mourning mother who carried on the labour of survival and bore her children’s pain acquired a special meaning after the death of Khaled Said, whose disfiguration gave momentum to the protests that led to January 2011. Maternal loss was interwoven with the absurdity of state violence and grief for the nation: *Kollena Khaled Said*,

the Facebook page that started the protests, identified all Egyptians with the young Alexandrian. We were all Khaled Said: the son, the young man, every mother's son.

Suffering and sorrow were transfigured into nationalist allegories: as Yousra, an activist and researcher working on memory and women's history, commented, "Why Khaled Said's sister isn't much more visible?" Similarly, Habiba commented during our interview that it would have been very different if, instead of Khaled Said, it had been Samira Ibrahim or Aliaa Elmahdy.¹⁶⁸ More than sisters or wives, mothers were transformed into powerful archetypal symbols: their political subjectivity as "mothers of the martyrs" was always mediated through their children's positions, as they lived their lives as witnesses to their children's erasure.

Amro Ali and Dina El-Sharnouby have commented that Khaled Said's "martyrdom turned him into an unreal youth" (Ali and El-Sharnouby 2015). They further state that while the figure of Khaled-the-hero successfully managed to bring together a large number of protestors in need of a strong symbol, it also alienated some young people because it neglected other youth struggles which were part of the quest for social justice (such as over poverty, unemployment or marital status). They suggest that, with the increasing number of groups that are successfully coordinating online platforms and engagement on the ground, there will be no need for archetypes to galvanize the young: their own lives will be their inspiration. Looking at how articulations of pain and discourses of remembering sacrifice are sexualized, I would rather suggest that an ongoing change in gendered symbols was already visible and working effectively at protests.

V. Heroines of Egypt? Sexualizing pride

Beside the symbolism of maternal sorrow, feminine pain and resistance to state violence started to find new pathways and new symbols before the revolution. While not explicitly political, in early 2006 the blog *Kollena Leila* (We Are All Leila) began a discussion about the experiences of young women in Egypt. The collective of bloggers identified itself with a fictitious literary character.¹⁶⁹ Under a name that expressed feminine freedom and independence, individual voices described a discomfort and pain that was independent of motherhood, and set an annual date to speak about women's oppression in the region. The

¹⁶⁸ Aliaa Elmahdy, a 20-year-old middle-class student at the American University in Cairo, famously posted naked pictures of herself on her blog to protest about sexism, religion and censorship in 2011.

¹⁶⁹ Leila is the young and free-spirited protagonist of the 1960 book *The Open Door* by Latifa El Zayat. See: Jillian York. "An Interview with the founder of Kolena Laila." Berkman Center Gender and Technology Blog. 7th January 2010. <https://blogs.harvard.edu/genderandtech/2010/01/07/an-interview-with-the-founder-of-kolena-laila/>. Last access: 20th January 2016.

blog grew for five years, and included voices from the wider Arab world, with both male and female participants: the purpose was increasingly to rediscover and make known lost powerful figures of Egyptian history, since everyday life confined women to subordinate positions and reproductive roles.¹⁷⁰ The growing interest since the mid-2000s in new anti-sexual harassment initiatives,¹⁷¹ and the continuous protests between 2011 and 2013, encouraged the engagement of more young women. The articulation of their experiential knowledge of pain, and the worlds where their affective economy circulated (in everyday life and digitally), became especially linked during the subsequent women's protests.

During the Women's March in 2013, representations of women martyrs of the revolution were fully displayed, giving an account and a face to all the women who had protested for their rights. Those who had survived the violence as well as those who had succumbed to it stood next to big black-and-white posters showing figures from Egyptian women's history. Pictures of Doria Shafik, one of the leaders of the women's movement in the 1940s, and of Mariam Fekry, a young copt killed in a church bombing in Alexandria in early January 2011, were held up alongside various flags and placards of revolutionary women arrested or wounded. Nefertiti with a gas mask, designed by artist El Zeft to represent the women at the forefront of the revolutionary protests, was adopted during protests, and was endorsed by several women activists and by the protest-focused anti-sexual harassment group OpAntiSH, discussed in Chapter IV.

The increasing presence of pictures of women wounded and killed, alongside famous, beloved Egyptian women and creative icons, was characteristic of women's protests during my fieldwork. Walter Armbrust has noted that in the case of Sally Zohran, the first recognized woman martyr, the discursive device of martyrdom – which had largely gained the support of protestors against the regime – was not successful (Armbrust 2013). The practice of effacing the picture of Sally Zohran, or of covering her hair (digitally or by hand) in the pictures of her pasted up around Tahrir square, visibly contested her position as a proper revolutionary. For conservative onlookers, her lack of modesty altered the moral and political significance of her death: she could not stand next to the other martyrs and their uncanny deaths. Questions about whether her death was accidental or unrelated to the revolution, putting her mother to shame, contributed to the particular erasure of her participation in the protest. The mechanism of remembrance of martyrdom did not apply to women: despite their bruises and

¹⁷⁰ See the account of the 2009 edition by Zeinobia, one of the founding bloggers. Zeinobia. "Kolena Laila: we are strong Arab ladies." *Egyptian Chronicles Blog*. 31st December 2009. <http://egyptianchronicles.blogspot.it/2009/12/kolena-laila-we-are-strong-arab-ladies.html>. Last access: 20th January 2016.

¹⁷¹ See Chapter V.

wounds, despite the irreparable damage and psychic pain they suffered, they were constantly asked for further, more determinant proof – either as survivors or as dead bodies.

It seems important to make a distinction here. Martyrdom (the male martyr; the mother of the martyr) was used to legitimize discourses and affective articulations of revolutionary struggle and participation in the nation. Gender dimensions strongly shaped this, visually and verbally. Yet it is necessary to distinguish between the wider revolutionary movement – where martyrdom was an effective symbol, refracted through different media, museums and protests – and various women's groups, especially those formed by younger generations, which did not project their pain into the symbolic world. Rather, these groups used sorrow and suffering to fuel their political visibility, as well as to elaborate an image of participation in the nation which transcended their individualities. At protests, the mothers of martyrs also had a strong political subjectivity motivated by their own suffering over someone's else pain, even if it was often absorbed into the metaphor of the grieving yet steadfast mother-nation. With the death of researcher Giulio Regeni in January 2016, Khaled Said's mother renewed her protests and spoke about the grief that protestors lived with as mothers and that fed the struggle which connected them all.¹⁷²

Among younger groups of women, who had no children and thus lacked the main basis of recognition in the struggle, suffering instead remained deeply personal and much harder to symbolize. Pictures of bloody faces, angry marches and proud beauty were not archetypes so much as visible motives for their presence as protestors: they differed from the more acknowledged paradigms of nationalist motherhood and martyrdom. In this sense, young women activists deployed images of women's material suffering and strength not as archetypes of martyrdom or national suffering, as in the wider revolutionary discourse, but as the reality of their condition: this fuelled their presence at protests, and their demands. Their own suffering and courage opened a new political space, ingrained in the domains of transformative personal experiences in arts, culture and politics.

VI. Opening archives

The limited representations and knowledge of women protestors, in 2011 and in Egyptian history as a whole, was one of the reasons that prompted Yousra, a young researcher, to start her own digital museum:

¹⁷² Her video message was posted on YouTube on 2nd April 2016. "Mothers of martyrs: from Said's to Regeni's." Youtube video, 1:11. Posted by The Januarians. 2nd April 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlxPcEyw-tg>. Last access: 27th April 2016.

I started by questioning why women are there, in the square, but are then always excluded by the official papers and by the pictures of the revolutionaries and martyrs. Take for instance Khaled Said. There are many pictures of his crying mother, but his sister has much less visibility. Maybe because she is not veiled? Maybe because she is divorced? It was something I had already seen when researching the figure of Nazli Fazl,¹⁷³ who run a literary salon during the Arab Revolution of 1879. There is so little about her in the revolution. So I felt someone had to do this for the women in our revolution. Not political parties. There was a huge need to remember.

The concealment of women's multiple efforts for their country was a deep concern for Yousra: she repeated to me several times how transformative the experience of the protests had been for the women she had met, and how many sacrifices women had made to advance the political cause of their country's freedom. Her "Digital Museum of Women"¹⁷⁴ was inspired by a very hard time in her life. The difficulties she had endured made her intent on keeping alive experiences that would otherwise be erased and forgotten. Divided into four areas – Women and Economy, Women and Politics, Women and Culture, and Women and Society – her digital museum aims to collect stories and visual narratives about women's experiences in building Egypt. For Yousra, the 2011 events gave birth to a political consciousness in everyday life which was unprecedented. Besides original contributions and personal stories, the website also offers information about other digital initiatives (such as the documentary collective Mosireen) that collect stories – not only about women – about January 2011. The ambition of Yousra's project is to avoid obliterating experiences that challenge dominant gender roles: forgetting for her is a risk for women themselves, and thus for the whole of society. Indeed, her museum's subtitle is "The Future of Women's History", revealing how a sense of temporalities is inscribed in her project in relation to women's erasures.

The exploratory and celebratory content of the digital museum connects this project to the video archive "Voices of Women of the Egyptian Revolution". This YouTube-based archive was started by Lebanese-Spanish queer artist LeilZahra and produced by Egyptian activist Nazli El Hussein in 2012. The collection of 14 interviews (two of which are double interviews with a mother and daughter) explores the lived experiences of a number of women activists – some of them well-known, such as Mahienour El Massry.¹⁷⁵ They are all Egyptians (apart from one activist from Bahrain) with diverse backgrounds and belonging to different generations: artists,

¹⁷³ Nazli Fazl was an Ottoman princess that befriended several political figures, including Saad Zaghloul and Qasim Amin, and supposedly encouraged their reforms.

¹⁷⁴ The website is still under construction, and Yasmine is still collecting funds and support to maintain and expand it. Digital Museum of Women. <http://digimow.wix.com/digimow->. Last access: 27th April 2016.

¹⁷⁵ Mahienour El Masry is an Alexandrian human-rights lawyer and socialist political activist who was jailed twice following accusations that she broke the Protest Law (Law 107/2013). She was released in August 2016 after 15 months in detention.

mothers, daughters, students, workers. The project collects personal oral histories told by the participants themselves, recorded in what seem to be their own domestic spaces. The stories were collected in a circle of solidarity and friendship with the director and producer. Within the richness of their differences, all the participants share how profoundly they have been transformed by the experience of the revolution: their gestures and facial expressions give body to the wonder and awareness they describe through their stories of participation in the protests.

A similar character of celebration and resilience permeates these two archives: they both aim not only to “represent” but also to “perform”. In both cases – but particularly in “Voices of Women of the Revolution”, because of the breadth and depth of the interviews – personal narratives and knowledge do not simply enter a circuit of celebrations and memorials. They envision remembering as opening up a wider discussion about women’s role in society by remaking and reconfiguring the significance of women’s knowledge of the revolution.

Writing about Argentina, Diana Taylor (2007) comments that “as a system of learning, storing and transmitting knowledge, performance studies allow us to expand what we understand by knowledge” (Taylor 2007: 16). Taylor differentiates performances – “embodied praxis and episteme” (Taylor 2007: 17) – from written archives, whose disembodiment recalls for her both the current digitalization of culture and the modern colonization of Latin America: during colonialism, the written word deleted precolonial culture in more ways than one. Elsewhere Taylor (2010) questions the times and spaces of digital archives, which are searched and studied without necessarily forming connections through established sequences as was once possible in traditional archives.

In fact, in the case of the women’s experiences recorded since 2012 and represented by the Digital Museum and Voices projects, I would argue that digitalization constitutes a particular type of performative act. As Malika, one of my main interlocutors in Chapter III, recalled of her experience in the square, “my body itself has changed, after that.” The very bodies of the protestors – filmed in all their intimacy, photographed at protests, or narrating their own life-changing acts in the square – are transformed into a moving archive of affects. Performatively, such affects resonate with the viewer, as experiences and stories pass onto and through the screens.

While digital archives certainly crystallize particular experiences “that were largely improvised in the square”, as Farida emphasized during our meeting, they also do something else: they offer a space of legitimacy (one of the few available) to everyday life – and in this sense, the use of the word “museum” is not accidental. They do so in particular by reminding us of the

mutual transformative effects of the protests on women, and of how women bore societal transformation. Legitimacy here does not come so much in the form of witnessing, or from external validation, but rather as a primary decision of the subject to make her voice heard and to create possibilities for affective encounters with those who access her story. There are no external objective proofs required to validate such knowledge: validation comes as the knowledge is made known and remembered again.

Feminine bodies as living archives, and feminine archives as performances, respond to the limiting and belittling of women's experiences, as well to the reporting of women's experiences in contexts of conflict. While reports have their institutional purpose for many activists groups, the coexistence of different spaces and times allows digital museums and documentaries to remake – by remembering – those who are excluded and uncomfortable presences in the present. Digital museums and documentaries stand in contrast to affect-imbued temporalities that exclude women from the nation's past and future. Knowledge-making brings to light the absences in narratives of martyrdom, and in militarized practices and narratives: women's creative work, in the revolution and outside it, emerges. Women's digital projects – where performances and archives, stories and bodies converge in the affective relation between the viewer/searcher and the women who produce knowledge – question the gendered embodiments of everyday-life politics and of how woman as nation (Kandiyoti 1991; Yuval-Davis 1997) can be dynamically articulated. No archive remains unchanged. Yet such digital repositories try to fight erasures by making knowledge public. They counteract the institutional version of events and their gendered dynamics, and find a space that would otherwise be unattainable in the current circumstances of censorship, financial scarcity and violence.¹⁷⁶ Through these initiatives, activists make and reaffirm women's knowledge as collective knowledge that exists outside martyrdom – by means of exhilaration, self-expression and courage.

VII. Walls and rooms: making joyful presences

As digital memories attempted to connect the "ordinary" experiences of the young women of Cairo to history, visual and material spaces also played a role in the transformation of knowledge production in post-revolutionary Cairo. The commercialization of artefacts showing iconic historical figures to which most Egyptians feel attached – such as the singer Umm Kulthoum, or Queen Nefertiti – entered into women's protests and campaigns, in particular those of the group Baheya Ya Masr. In March 2013 a celebration of a number of Egyptian

¹⁷⁶ See the attempted closure of the organization El Nadeem in late February 2016. El Nadeem Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/notes/el-nadeem/our-reply-to-the-moh-allegations-regarding-closure-of-el-nadim/10154003084354365>. Last access: 15th March 2016.

women, organized by this group at the German Institute in Downtown Cairo, saw a parade of panels and figures that mixed scientists, academics and well-known feminists with pictures of figures from Egyptian history. Similar attempts were made in the iconography of protests against violence against women during 2013, and were repeated on a much larger scale during International Women's Day in 2013. Flags displaying Umm Kulthoum, Soad Hosny¹⁷⁷ and labour activist Shahenda Maklad, among others, reclaimed a history – that of women culturally celebrated in Egypt as “ordinary”. Recalling the organization of a march against the then President Morsy in Downtown, Nahla, an older activist, told me that she had carried a huge poster in her hands, rolled up and ready to be unfurled in the square. Groups of men on the way had not wanted to let her pass, and had started questioning the chaos forming in the streets, until her poster unfurled and they saw what it was: “So thank god it was Umm Kulthoum! I could then tell them, you see, if we won't protest, soon we won't be able to listen to any more music, to enjoy any dance... not only Umm Kulthoum.” Relating a beloved cultural icon to the protests was a strategy that helped Nahla to show how the perceived transgression of the moral boundaries of gender expectations was instead an invitation to a collective effort – of women and men – to construct together a pleasurable society rather than an oppressive one.

The relationship between ordinary and extraordinary women in Egypt was a starting point for the Egyptian collective Nooneswa, in particular with their *Graffiti Harimi* (female graffiti) campaign in 2012. Founded by Merna Thomas and Shady Khalil, with the collaboration of other members, the group was centred on the idea of challenging gender stereotypes through stencils. All its members had a strong interest in creative tools. They collaborated with various groups – from Nazra and Bussy to children-led projects – and made use of popular culture, both as a cultural means accessible to a wide audience (such as the then-popular stencils and graffiti) and as content familiar to the vast majority of society. In their stencils for the campaign “Graffiti Harimi” the group played with famous lines – taken from songs by Souad Hosny (such as “a girl is like a boy”) and Umm Kulthoum (“give me my freedom, release my hands”), but also from the words of labour activist Widad Eldemerdash¹⁷⁸ – to highlight gender bias and double standards at work in society. The stencils revealed ironically the naturalization

¹⁷⁷ Soad Hosny (1942–2001) was one of the most popular Egyptian actresses and singers, whose fame rocketed after the 1950s, during the golden era of Egyptian cinema.

¹⁷⁸ Widad Eldemerdash is one of the most prominent workers' activist in El Mahalla, one of the largest industrial districts in Egypt. The stencil tweaked her famous quote “Egypt gives birth to men” to “Egypt gives birth to women.” See: Andre Fecteau. “A graffiti campaign brings strong female voices to the streets.” Egypt Independent. 10th March 2012. <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/graffiti-campaign-brings-strong-female-voices-streets>. Last access: 15th March 2016.

of gender roles and the discomfort of women in public spaces, and implicitly pointed out the potent gap between the “golden era” lived by these female icons, who are still nostalgically celebrated, and the position of most women in contemporary Egypt. The use of female figures, and of gendered speeches taken from TV or cinema and projected onto a wall, also made them different from the majority of street artists.¹⁷⁹

Hoda, a very creative independent activist, commented: “With the revolution, there was a form of initiation some people had. The question is, can the memory die? Can it die when we are believing in change?” From storytelling sessions held at Nazra, she and her group developed the idea of using art as a feminist strategy, taking graffiti and visual arts as a starting point, with campaigns that would be visible in the city to any passer-by. Rabia commented:

The graffiti were the ones with Souad Hosny, Faten Hamama,¹⁸⁰ Nadia Lotfy,¹⁸¹ you know, from *Lil-rigal Faqat (Only for Men)*¹⁸² ... all strong women. Graffiti is simple and direct. And in the graffiti we were just reminding them [the viewers] Egyptian culture, not imposing any culture on them. The engagement with the viewers was completely different in this case.

The idea of using famous and beloved icons was meant by both Hoda and Rabia as a way of making explicit a gendered discrepancy in the presence and validity of women’s experience and expression. It also stitched together a different temporality, between past cultural figures, current cultural expressions and political change: gender roles were called into question in a playful manner, as part of the most important shift of the revolution that somehow had already been anticipated. The conscious use of beloved figures revealed the intention of

¹⁷⁹ Street art in Egypt started primarily in Alexandria, in particular with a young woman artist, Aya Tarek. The fact that her subjects hardly ever have to do with politics does not make her any less of an engaged artist interested in gender issues. She is part of the project “Voices of Women of the Egyptian Revolution”. More women street artists, such as the Mozza, emerged in Cairo who developed feminine themes and figures. The 2015 documentary *Nefertiti’s Daughters* portrays their trajectories. See also: Soraya Morayef. “Women in graffiti: a tribute to the women of Egypt.” *Suzee in the City blog*. 7th January 2013. <https://suzeeinthecity.wordpress.com/2013/01/07/women-in-graffiti-a-tribute-to-the-women-of-egypt>. Last access: 15th March 2016.

¹⁸⁰ Faten Hamama (1931–2015) was a legendary actress in Egyptian cinema and television.

¹⁸¹ Nadia Lotfy (b. 1934) is a retired and much-loved Polish-Egyptian actress. She often worked with Souad Hosny.

¹⁸² *Lil-rigal Faqat (Only for Men)* is a 1964 comedy directed by Mahmoud Zul-Fikar and starring Souad Hosni and Nadia Lotfy. The plot revolves around two women geologists who are prevented from working on a state-owned oil site in Sinai, since sites are “only for men”: the two women not only deliver a speech to prove that women can work as well as if not better than men, but they also decide to go to Sinai in disguise as men. This decision forms the basis of the plot, as Salwa (Souad Hosny) and Hind (Nadia Lotfy) become attracted to two technicians at the plant, but cannot reveal their feelings because they are passing as men. Menicucci (1998) comments that while the comedy is about gender-segregated work, it was one of the few movies in the Arab region about same-sex social life.

forging new paths of engagement based on forms of familiar remembrance that were understood as part of the country already, and not as coming from outside.

However, this engagement strategy was not always facilitated by using art. In a 2013 magazine article, one member of Nooneswa, Merna, recalled how even the gesture of making graffiti in an open space was important for women to feel that it was their space too, especially as such spaces were shrinking, and even if the women were attacked, which was in any case a sign that things were moving.¹⁸³ Indeed, their work was often erased, if they were not prevented from completing it altogether – as happened in Mahalla. Such incidents also happened to the street art initiative “Women on Walls” (WOW) in Mansoura in 2013, when the audience contested and ruined the graffiti themselves. As an initiative started by Cairo-based journalist Mia Grondhal (who edited various books about street art in Cairo) and cultural expert Angie Balata, WOW had a more “developmentalist” manifesto centred on empowering Arab women by discussing women’s issues and rights, and making female street artists visible.¹⁸⁴

Although WOW was primarily centred on female artists and street art about women – the design was entirely left to the creativity of the artists themselves, and could include loose connections with popular culture – it included a preliminary workshop for all artists involved in the project, where gender theories were explored. In this way, all participating artists could share the same background and knowledge about the meanings of working on gender issues, even if they did not necessarily share the same understanding. A similar workshop was held at Nazra with comic artists and illustrators in preparation for their magazine, published in 2015. The workshop, as Rabia shared, was useful to clarify common misunderstandings of feminism, and of what gender means for society at large and in artistic practices in particular.

Across all these different positions recalling or reclaiming an active role for a female presence through art, and sensitizing artists about feminism and gender issues, the same ephemerality affected both initiatives, which are currently inactive. The gendered absence of women in the cultural and social space of the patriarchal nation, and the work of recalling it, was evoked by means of temporary stencils or artworks on possibly temporary walls, always under threat of attack by police or bystanders. Their precariousness further emphasized the precarious settings where gender relations were recalled and re-enacted in order to be relearned.

¹⁸³ Julie Tomlin. “Egyptian women take up the spray can in battle to be heard.” *Women’s Views on News*. 21st March 2012. <http://www.womensviewsonnews.org/2012/03/egyptian-women-take-up-the-spray-can-in-battle-to-be-heard>. Last access: 27th April 2016.

¹⁸⁴ WOW can only be found online on its official website. <http://womenonwalls.org/about/>. Last access: 27th April 2016. In 2015, WOW pioneered the largest street artwork in the Middle East, in Amman, Jordan.

These experiences enrich analyses of art and activism in the Middle East, such as those by Nancy Demerdash (2012) and Jessica Winegar (2013). Demerdash (2012) reads murals and street art pieces as an expression of the memories and feelings of the artists. These become part of the collective engagement, especially as they represent a site of engagement disconnected from the role of galleries and art circuits. For Demerdash, art is crucially used as a tool to tell a story and grow solidarity: “Murals enable the articulation of rebellion and resistance in multiple artistic vocabularies,” even when “erasure and coerced forgetting remain the tactics of residual, dictatorial governmentality” (Demerdash 2012: 11-12). Similarly, Jessica Winegar (2006) underlines that the aesthetics of art pieces in Egypt, more than the style, is discursively framed in different ways by artists and audiences (Winegar 2006: 13) – but always consistently using the trope of the nation as a stylistic tool.

However, the type of knowledge produced through feminist graffiti throws into question how to look at politically and culturally charged memories that are differently saved and performed for women. It was not a minor stylistic choice that the vast majority of murals were exclusively dedicated to male martyrs (from the Ultras and artists to the teenagers-angels eating foul on Mohamed Mahmoud Street). While artists narrate their own memories and experiences in order to connect with a wider community, the gendered discourses that subtend these narrations and cross conscious and unconscious values cannot be overlooked. As the workshops at Nazra and WOW underline, cultural production about shifts in the nation-state – although filtered through a personal artistic sensitivity – requires awareness of the unspeakable gendered symbols and affects embedded within it. Making visual works in an open and public space that speak to a national community as such has gendered implications for those bodies – especially female bodies – that feel threatened and erased in those very spaces, whether while making street art, as viewers, or as part (or not) of the subject represented. Thus in this sense revolutionary art may not only indicate but also subtly reproduce the same dynamics of melancholic lives and bodies that do not matter, which feminist groups refuse to leave ignored.

It can be often the case, as Winegar (2006) comments, that the use of iconographic idioms belonging to the nation is less meant to express special nationalist sentiments and is much more a practical device for an artist to find a “third place” between colonialism, authenticity and modernity. What kind of nationalism, though, does this practicality depict, and what kind of practicality does it refer to? Nationalism is part of daily consumption, although it also exceeds it, as shown in earlier chapters. But most importantly, the gendered practicality of nationalist idioms is to be questioned and challenged, as part of the creation of alternatives to patriarchal authoritarianism – that is, if the content facilitates an expressive language about

social change while also placing constraints on the very women who participate in that change. WOW and especially Graffiti Harimi not only tried to develop multiple ways in which women could be made present; they also subtly displaced the gendered contradictions of popular nationalist culture, as well as the gendered nationalist dynamics of much street art, the revolutionary cultural production par excellence.

VIII. Deschooling gender: between everyday life and formal sessions

The concern about using idioms and means to get “out there” and reach out in everyday life was also explicitly mentioned by Malak, a young co-founder of the new feminist collective, in autumn 2013, when I met her just before the collective’s first meeting. She described her excitement about the new initiative and how she saw it:

I am concerned about reaching out... We have now some gender schools, like at Nazra. And of course I read a lot on Facebook, there are blogs I like and I read. But I always keep thinking about reaching out, about doing something in your own country, in everyday life. So now we have here a big reflexivity moment, a big interest in telling your own story. It is more proactive rather than reactive. There is universality in feminism, but tactics are different. [...] Now I need to read, I read to break the comfort zone, like with the sexuality workshop; I need challenging texts, and I need to challenge texts! Feminism is not about sticking to a behaviour... and it is very important now, since none is touching radical topics, and they fall into a grey zone because they don’t have a production.

Malak’s excitement about knowledge in various forms included blogs as a source of knowledge and feminist networking that contributes to ongoing activism in Egypt. For her, producing knowledge was not only part of constructing her own identity, but also had to do with changing the character of strategies and locating her own standpoint as a radical feminist of colour. Like other members of the collective, she was eager to find and write original output in Arabic, and she was looking forward to producing it with her collective. Beside the meetings and film screenings in the small apartment in the popular neighbourhood of Abbaseyya where the collective was based, the collective offered translations of books on gender into Arabic, and had a small free library available to the public (including digitally). The collective organized mostly free sessions on sexuality and gender studies, given by academics and researchers. They also organized theatrical productions focused on gender narratives outside Cairo. The hunger for knowledge bound the group together, making it possible for a diversity of “feminisms” – from Islamic feminism to queer feminism of colour – to coexist within the same collective. The encouragement of a diversity of theoretical positions in the personal contributions to the group was also experienced in other groups, such as Nazra and Women

and Memory. This seems to be a sign of an intersectional feminism opening up different subjectivities beyond the “Egyptian feminist/woman activist” label.

The collective’s output – with its introduction of different forms of knowledge in Arabic – involved bodies, interests and affects as much as texts. Rejecting the idea of translation, which is to some extent linked to modernity and nation-making projects (El Shakry 2007; see also Chakrabarty 1993), it published two issues between 2014 and 2015. The collective’s *Journal* included personal pieces on the body and authoritarianism, and was aimed at an audience not necessarily concerned with academic language – unlike more recent feminist publications in the area, which have a wider spectrum of contributors from the MENA region, such as the Beirut-based *Kohl*. As explained by Farida, another member of the collective, the ordinariness of everyday life was not only the object of her activism but also the greatest source of knowledge. For Farida, blogs and creative initiatives in Arabic provided particular inspiration and motivation. Like Malak, she mentioned the Lebanese feminist group Nassawya, whose activities – a radio programme, several film screenings, and an original programme of meetings and publications – represented an interesting and engaging combination of different strategies (although since 2015 they seem to have been discontinued).

The use of creative strategies to produce a specific feminist knowledge in daily life, written by Egyptian feminists and women activists – in parallel with the exploration of institutional avenues of participation, such as political training and assessment – was a core feature of Nazra. Art was present in many of the feminist organization’s initiatives, especially in ways that spoke to everyday experiences. Beside the street art initiatives described above, the idea of publishing the first comic magazine on feminist themes started taking shape in 2013, when Rabia first described to me how she had been approaching illustrators and artists to get them engaged in gender issues. In 2015 Nazra put out a music CD (*Bent El Masrawa*) born out of a workshop around gender stereotypes in Upper Egypt. These two initiatives were created in parallel with more “traditional” approaches: for instance, a political training school for women in 2012, and a gender school in 2013. The latter was structured around readings by Egyptian and Middle Eastern writers, and was organized by PhD researcher and feminist activist Hind Zaki as an academic short course.

While keeping open the dialectic between informality and rules, between everyday experiences and academic knowledge production, gender schools and seminars co-opted in a more systematic manner the growing interest in gender issues among young women and men, including outside Cairo. Schools and workshops made it easier to reach out and validate a knowledge relatively unknown to many through the idiom of academic education. Indeed, they

were inspired by the small number of academic courses on gender available in Egypt, which were inaccessible to a wider section of the youth population.

In their intention of continuously producing solid and stimulating knowledge related to feminism and women's activism in Egypt – of “teaching to transgress”, to paraphrase bell hooks (1994) – these sessions are reminiscent of the seminal work done from the 1990s onwards by Women and Memory¹⁸⁵ to keep alive the memory of Egyptian writers and intellectuals. Indeed, Nazra collaborated on some of the sessions at the gender school with a member of Women and Memory. Their aim is for their “students” to be able to relate their personal experiences to authors from the region; to form and expand circles involved in gender issues across Egypt; and to contribute in original ways to feminist knowledge in Arabic, bringing together existing and new knowledge. The use of a wide number of artistic means, and the production of original output on gender by young artists and participants, “queers” the tools of knowledge production for both Nazra and Farida and Malak's collective.

A further element that signals a rupture with previous similar initiatives is its extensive digitalization, which represents a global trend in education. In Egypt digitalization was encouraged, for instance, by funding available through the private Arab Digital Expression Foundation.¹⁸⁶ The mix of online and offline material enables knowledge production to be less centralized and expensive, to be more sensitive to intersectional issues (such as class, race and age), and to pay attention to the physical constraints of geographical distance and material limitations (for instance, for those who cannot afford a university course in Cairo). A concern with the cost of knowledge affected all the groups that were trying to expand their artistic strategies – even more so when they were producing knowledge in more established and structured ways. Malak underlined that everything organized by the collective was free, with the specific aim of providing informal education for everyone, without compromising quality.¹⁸⁷

For all these reasons, young activists' groups working on knowledge digitalized their production consistently, alongside publications and seminars. The resulting archives are not

¹⁸⁵ The Women and Memory Forum is a women's group founded in 1997 in Cairo. It aims to highlight women's cultural contributions and preserve the historical memory of women in Egypt, through a library, a series of meetings, workshops and seminars, and publications and stage plays based on traditional storytelling – both online and off.

¹⁸⁶ See: Abdel-Rahman Sherief. "ADEF prepares youth for the digital age." *Daily News Egypt*. 3rd February 2013. <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/02/03/adef-prepares-youth-for-the-digital-age/> org. Last access: 4th June 2016.

¹⁸⁷ A fundraising campaign held between November and December 2015 was a sign that the voluntary activities at the new feminist collective required new resources to keep all of this available for free.

museums or encyclopaedias. They are disseminated across different spaces (participants' bodies, social media pages, and hard-copy documents distributed at the seminars) that try to overcome the constraints placed on gender and feminist research in Egypt. The resulting knowledge is less static and more dynamically co-produced among different authors, reflecting a diversity of sources and directions. This move helps to "decentre" knowledge (and practices) and push it outside Cairo (including abroad). It attempts to grow networks in a region where young people may be yearning for feminist knowledge but have few or no options to access it. The same structure of knowledge dissemination articulates ways of making feminist knowledge that not only start from the margins of culture, but also move the centre of knowledge itself – resonating with seminal work by transnational women of colour (see for instance Mohanty and Alexander 1997; Mohanty 2003).

The parallel work online and offline, where the participants can follow each other and see their achievements, marks a difference which is even more substantive. In connecting spaces and theoretical encounters to personal experiences – stories about bodily violence, harassment and political consciousness – these seminars and workshops became a tool to re-evaluate women's/female knowledge. They not only evidenced absences in vernacular feminist knowledge, but also offered ways to validate and gender knowledge in a wider sense, particularly knowledge produced by women on gender issues. The stigma attached to feminist knowledge focused on the experiential form of that knowledge: feminist knowledge was dismissed as "irrational", non-formal, lacking "dignity", creating disturbances in an otherwise "logical" knowledge. But these gendered experiences were precious to young women activists, enabling them to validate and interpret feminist theory and affects, and vice versa. Engendering opportunities to make feminist knowledge both responded to and fuelled the enthusiasm and hunger for more knowledge as a way to understand and often disrupt gender roles – in everyday life as much as in moments of political consciousness.

The lack of a national programme to encourage Egyptian output on gender issues revealed that the erasures regarded not only the role women played in knowledge, but also what women's knowledge as such was for the nation. For groups such as Farida and Malak's collective, and Nazra, questioning the gendered hierarchy of knowledge – by producing their own, and by incorporating past feminist knowledge into the experiences of many participants in protests, workshops and digital platforms – was an anti-colonial praxis more than a narrowly pedagogical project. Through it, young groups tried to tackle the systemic issue of patriarchal society as a whole.

IX. The affective labour of activism

By the end of my stay in Cairo, some encounters with activists emphasized the peculiarity of discontinuities and dissonances as part of women's and feminist activism itself. When talking of activism and of the times they had experienced in feminist spaces, many of my interviewees would let out a sigh. "I felt tired, so tired," commented Malak, describing why she had stopped attending protests in the square. "I could not go any more, I felt like I was collecting points for a badge. And it was so tiring, to do all this work, and to do it all the time... I needed a change in what I was doing." Salima, a feminist and urban researcher, offered a similar take on the various rapid changes through which groups and individual activists had passed: "Activism is activism in whatever thing you are doing." She recognized that one of the consequences of this is that at times there are initiatives no one knows about, as shifts happens quickly during highly politicized moments, transforming even a small action into a political act.

Reem, one of Nazra's researchers working with women's rights defenders in 2012, recalled that often women human rights defenders outside Cairo did not know of each other's existence: they believed they were alone and were fighting their own battles. Indeed, part of the project Reem was co-conducting at Nazra was to connect women's rights defenders to each other, especially those working in regions close to each other, so as to create networks of support and friendship. While all these comments represented activism as discontinuous and as subject to its own erasures, my interviewees related such fluctuations to particular affects that were attached to certain aspects of the "labour of protest" and knowledge production: the sadness of carrying memories that are delegitimized and ignored; the stress of physically and continuously attending protests, always with the same energy; the unhappiness of feeling alone.

In part, it can be argued that engaged activism in Egypt – outside the formality of NGOs, and within the restricted financial resources available – certainly competes with reproductive labour in the domestic sphere. It can constitute a parallel form of unpaid reproductive work, rather than a collaborative, shared effort to protest against precarious social conditions; ultimately, it goes against creative work, being reduced to labour power. One example of this was given to me by Manal, who joked bitterly about all the women who stopped attending meetings after the revolution because they were busy taking care of husbands and children, or because they preferred to stay at work rather than to join the new groups as promised. The reproductive labour needed by their families had returned to organize the times of their lives, and Manal regarded their choices (or obligations) with disillusionment and disappointment. But looking at affects in relation to the specificities of activist labour, I suggest that subjects are also directed and structured around affects attached to objects and bodies; they are

structured around forms of affective knowledge – such as the fear of making art in public, the constant anger of protests, or the melancholia of absent feminist memories. Different affects may be felt and expressed to signal different directions and times of producing knowledge in the dynamic relationship that feminist and women’s activism entertains with its material context, nationalist and transnational politics, neoliberalism and militarist patriarchy. As Dunya – a feminist who takes care of several young feminists, and was part of the new collective as well – emphasized:

With activism this is always the case. It works as a puzzle. Sometimes, we work. Sometimes, we pass from fun to engagement. From rooms we go public, and we use blogs to expose ourselves, our personal things, but still, we put it out. We may be living by the rules, but the system for me does not exist. Being very critical, deconstructing, questioning ourselves...

Dunya described the discontinuities using a vocabulary that underlined inner slippages within feminist activism: between work and fun, between personal and public, between “living by the rules” and at the same time not acknowledging the system. While Dunya described this fragmentation positively, as part of the critical essence of a feminism that always seeks to construct while deconstructing, for Manal such discontinuities were not necessarily positive. Her bitterness during our meeting was caused by the awareness not only that reproductive work had returned to dominate the post-revolutionary world, but also that the promise she had seen in the experience of the protests seemed now to be less desirable and almost forgotten among her absent friends. Sara Ahmed’s work on “sticky feelings” and the politics of emotions, and queer authors who focus on the conditions under which “emotions can attach us to... subordination” (Ahmed 2004: 12; see also Butler 1997; Berlant 2000), speaks particularly to Dunya’s and Manal’s affective states.

Affects pinpoint Egyptian women activists’ dissonance with the world they inhabit. Affects address why for them it was so vital to refuse the erasures of hegemonic discourses and affective expressions. Pain and fatigue, but also humour and celebration, were attached by young feminists to fused forms of knowledge and experience (bodily memories, artistic expressions, theoretical elaborations) that connected them to moments of political consciousness in both the past and the present. But overall, these attachments connected them with what this knowledge promised for the future.

X. Happiness, disturbance, self-care and solidarity: feminist affects

For some of my interviewees, the disturbing affects attached to feminism were not always discouraging. Sometimes they helped activists from very different positions and backgrounds to come together. But horrific disappearances and arrests of activists and civilians also helped

to coalesce friendships and alliances among feminists as a way of responding together to the fear of authoritarianism. Digital media facilitated (albeit ambivalently) forms of solidarity, as in the case of the transnational campaign “Save Our Girls” for the liberation of hundreds of Nigerian girls kidnapped by Islamist militias. Several young Egyptian women posted their own pictures in support of the liberation of the girls. Tragically, in 2014 one of them – human rights activist Yara Sallam – herself became the subject of a campaign, #rememberingyara.

Among other campaigns that continue to this day, demanding the liberation of activists and civilians detained without fair trial and keeping under observation the dramatic number of disappeared civilians, the campaign for Yara Sallam was intended both to remember her and to record for her the things she could not see from her prison. Family, colleagues and friends circulated posts tagged #rememberingyara: past and recent pictures of Yara; their own pictures and reflections dedicated to her; attempts to raise awareness in the streets about her incarceration; her letters from prison; and updates and general political and legal requests for her release, which was granted as an act of propaganda at the end of 2015. Stitching together the present, past and future, this almost entirely digital campaign was a collective effort in knowledge production about feminism. It tried to shed light on the intimate life of a woman activist and feminist, which had been temporarily erased by her own nation-state; on her humanity and exceptional skills, but also on the ordinary relationships that made up her worlds; on the worlds of others who had met her and were now sharing their worlds with many more. Online written interventions by several African feminists, and the publication of articles in her support, were part of a circuit of solidarity and reciprocity that made Yara constantly present throughout her detention, and built shared knowledge – about her and by her – while she was in the limbo of prison.

The labour of knowledge and affects is not small work. Knowing she was in unjust detention, I had a difficult time listening again to the joyful character of Yara’s interview, which I had recorded many months before her imprisonment. She asked me if I had read the online booklet published in 2012 by Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Human Rights, *What is a Revolution if I Cannot Dance?* (Barry and Djordjevic 2008). Quoting anarchist feminist Emma Goldman in the title, the authors collected the personal thoughts and affective memories of women human rights activists from different areas of the world. Yara explained to me her enthusiasm for the collection, as she felt attuned to its feeling of hope and its sometimes ironic lightness, which she found potentially extremely effective for activism. She enthusiastically endorsed a couple of campaigns and actions which were deliberately based on “fun” and pleasure – not only celebration. These initiatives had been launched in Cairo on the basis of similar beliefs: that “fun” was also a feminist affect to fight patriarchy without falling into self-

indulgence and activist “comfort” – while engendering new knowledge about women and women’s activists in particular. The “Women Riding Bikes and Scooters in Cairo” initiative in the spring and summer of 2013 encouraged rides for girls and women only. The purpose was to enjoy the feeling of riding freely for its own sake – even to enjoy being looked at negatively – and of retaking the public space, like the “modern” Egyptian woman in the 1950 Vespa advertisement often evoked. Although difficult to carry on with any continuity without substantial structure or funding, such initiatives tried to reverse the hierarchies of established stereotypes through bodily practices that played with irony and enjoyment as feminist affects.

Yara, herself a bike rider, was critical of the use of happiness in Western-based feminist campaigns. In particular, she contrasted the UAFWR booklet with the “One Billion Rising” UN campaign in 2013. Like most campaigns at the time in Egypt – such as Coca-Cola’s donation campaign to fund education in collaboration with the Ministry of the Interior – the central affective message of the UN campaign was “happiness”. Rather than the “empathy” of campaigns based on “turning the tables” on gender (mentioned in Chapter IV), this type of mainstreaming of happiness required a sort of affective coercion of feminism: it identified feminism with a necessary positivity – that is, making responsibility for happiness an identifying feature of feminism, ignoring the plurality of living conditions and affects experienced by women everywhere.

The feeling of heaviness that accompanied many interviews was quite common: it had prompted Manal, the owner of a business in central Cairo, to start a series of workshops centred on well-being. “I figure out we could not continue this way... it is too heavy. We need some space to just breathe and to feel ok. Be it yoga, be it meditation, be it whatever... but well-being is essential to keep on going.” In a similar fashion, Farida and Malak’s collective organized, in collaboration with the transnational organization Women Living Under Muslim Laws, a session on well-being, under a slogan that quoted Audre Lorde’s *A Burst of Light* (Lorde 1988: 131): “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” The act of self-care, in the moment women activists were being erased – in the accounts of their lived experience, in their knowledge, in their presences, in their affects – was about preserving oneself.

The insistence on wellness raised questions about the long-term sustainability of the anger Sara Ahmed (2010) refers to when talking about the “feminist killjoy”, of the solitary grief of women’s lives, and of the struggle over feminist knowledge as a struggle over feminist affects. How is self-care related to happiness, in ways that do not dismantle a decolonizing feminist knowledge? According to Berlant’s (2011) essay on the cruelty of optimism in the contemporary USA, the aspiration to the good life is an attachment which is taught through

repetitions and scenes based on middle-class lives, and which is unattainable. The cruelty lies in the desire for normative fantasies, which depend on “the intensity of the need to feel normal” (Berlant 2011: 180). For the women activists I encountered, the desire for the good life depended on the different gender dynamics they had experienced and learnt, especially during moments of political and personal engagement. The cruelty of activist optimism and the weariness of their everyday lives did not lie in the impossibility of matching their desires to the material context of “crisis ordinariness” (Berlant 2011: 101). Cruelty was perhaps to be found in the challenge of cultivating a diversity of desires about feminist knowledge and life in the long term; in the frailty of a project that kept being postponed and interrupted. Yet the project kept going nonetheless.

Self-preservation as a political act, in the words of Audre Lorde (1988), is a responsibility not only to oneself but also to others. It is not, however, an individual neoliberal responsibility that obscures privileges and conceals hierarchies of oppression. Instead it is a way of expanding the possibilities of living. Projects of knowledge production in Cairo are decolonizing, and are taking on self-care as a responsibility to others too: their costs and paradoxes reflect the constraints within which women have to live, and their attempts to escape them as they risk their own lives in hope, and memory, of a good life.

XI. Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the production of feminist knowledge among young feminist and women’s groups in Cairo through digital memorial sites, informal schools and meetings, visual campaigns and affective strategies. These initiatives represent the possibility of challenging discourses on the colonialism of subject formation, cultural politics and gendered dimensions of hegemonic nationalist affects. By challenging gender hierarchies and the cultural and affective construction of a gendered nation, young feminist and women’s rights activists give legitimacy to feminist and women’s knowledge, and to feminist affects.

Graffiti art, digital memorials and workshops emerge among women’s groups and activists as tools for learning, political consciousness and creating presences. They highlight women’s erasures from nationalist memory as well as from cultural and political spaces. A violent dismissal has targeted women protestors in the legitimacy of their knowledge: the interference of the state and patriarchal condescendence towards women’s experiences has affected young women activists since the 2011 protests. The continuation of creative strategies, as well as of more established ones, around gender issues and feminist affects has been inspired by different influences: an ongoing art scene concerned with authoritarianism; the diffusion of digital resources as accessible and dynamic sites of memorial and resistance

(as with Khaled Said); the increasing control over urban spaces, which has limited many of these practices since 2014; the limiting gender discourses and affective expressions of nationalism, such as martyrdom and motherhood. In the growing precariousness and erasures of women's activism, the activists' fatigue does not only signal the changing reproductive relations of the labour of protest after the wave of upheavals. It also highlights moments when projects are redirected towards new strategies and feminist affects – such as pleasure and pain.

As much as cultural erasures elide the role of women in social history, the moments of discontinuity described in this chapter show that joy and pain are attached to gendered dynamics within activism and society. They are part of the unspeakable aspects of personal stories about these dynamics – often expressed through popular cultural constructions in Egypt at the time: street art and digital archives as decolonial projects. Affects enter into the labour of activism as they mark stages of the transformation and mobilization of the movement, as well as its own reproduction. The ability to continue reaching out depends on securing financial stability for the groups, but also on continuing to change in relation to affective and material scenarios of hope, self-care and disturbance. Competing with reproductive work in the family and society, the momentum of women's protests sometimes turns into volatile activities. Discourses on well-being and the preoccupation with self-care as a political practice reveal how feminist consciousness has been put under pressure by the patriarchal reproduction of society.

Government and military silence on women's absences and disappearances brought several groups together in collective action. Pain as much as joy helped to coalesce groups and renew strategies that opened up new political spaces and discourses on gender roles. Although they referred to temporalities of past and future activism, these did not develop through the highly commodified cultural nostalgia, nor did they conform to nationalist tropes. The weariness and lack of structural support point towards the intention among women activists to create communities of care. Affects attached to certain practices and theories enabled activists to share and reinforce collective memories – and hence presences – with others. As part of a relational engagement rather than as an individual responsibility, well-being reinforced their antagonism towards hegemonic discourses about their knowledge, experience and labour. Between ups and downs, young feminist and women's rights activists continued to redress the erasure of women, and to create affective spaces and times for feminist lives.

CONCLUSION

As I write the last part of this thesis, Egypt is approaching the sixth anniversary of the revolution. In the past few years there have been more deaths and imprisonments than celebrations. Dissenters are being removed from public view en masse. They include thousands of people tortured, incarcerated or banned from travelling, ranging from members and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood to journalists, ordinary prisoners, activists, human-rights lawyers, members of the LGBTQI community, students, workers, children and those living precarious lives. In the city of Cairo, the walls of Mohamed Mahmoud Street – which presents a political memory of the revolution's many stages and participants in a large display of street art – have been partly destroyed.¹⁸⁸ The Protest Law and NGO Law are crushing civil society, political dissent and forms of collaboration (including funding) with local and foreign groups.¹⁸⁹ There is a severe shortage of basic supplies such as sugar, milk, subsidized birth-control pills and medicines,¹⁹⁰ the import of which is made more difficult by the recent weakening of the Egyptian currency.¹⁹¹ Yet the regime tells another story, one in which there is no longer any risk of falling into dictatorship,¹⁹² Egyptians are taken care of as if they were the President's children (Shenker 2015), and the graffiti are being removed to beautify Cairo. Egypt's young people were institutionally celebrated last October at the first National Youth Conference in Sharm El Sheikh.¹⁹³ Ironically, the languishing tourist site of Sharm El Sheikh is

¹⁸⁸ "Mohamed Mahmoud demolition for beauty, not politics, says Cairo official." *Mada Masr*. 18th September 2015. <http://www.madamasr.com/en/2015/09/18/news/u/mohamed-mahmoud-demolition-for-beauty-not-politics-says-cairo-official>. Last access: 10th October 2016.

¹⁸⁹ "Update: Egypt's parliament passes new NGO law." *Mada Masr*. 29th November 2016. <http://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/11/29/news/u/parliament-passes-new-ngo-law>. Last access: 29th November 2016.

¹⁹⁰ Diaa Hadid and Nour Youssef. "Sweet-toothed Egypt endures a sugar crisis: people are going to snap." *New York Times*. 20th October 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/21/world/middleeast/egypt-sugar-shortage.html>. Last access: 30th October 2016.

¹⁹¹ Jane Arraf. "Amid economic crisis, even sugar becomes a luxury in Egypt." *NPR*. 21st November 2016. <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/11/21/502841567/amid-economic-crisis-even-sugar-becomes-a-luxury-in-egypt>. Last access: 21st November 2016.

¹⁹² "Al-Sisi stresses on Egypt's respect for human rights in interview with Portuguese news agency." *Daily News Egypt*. 19th November 2016. <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2016/11/19/598934>. Last access: 20th November 2016.

¹⁹³ The conference was boycotted by several democratic parties. On the day, a parallel social-media action called attention to the missing and incarcerated youth of Egypt, and to the regime's hypocrisy. The slogan/hashtag used was "Where have all the young ones gone?" or "Al-shabab feen?" The ECWR joined the conference in the form of a group of young female leaders trained by the centre in cooperation with UN Fund for Gender Equality. See: "Women's voices' leaders participate in the first National Youth Conference held in Sharm el-Sheikh." *ECWR*. 2nd November 2016. <http://ecwronline.org/?p=7313>. Last access: 10th November 2016.

also where ousted President Mubarak is reported to be currently living in his former winter residence – while large numbers of Egypt’s children and young people live in prisons, or disappear, or return as corpses. It is also where, at the Economic Forum in March 2015, the Italian Prime Minister publicly confirmed Italy’s geopolitical support against terrorism and a lucrative economic alliance with the Egyptian government,¹⁹⁴ which one year later is still marked by silence over investigations into the murder of Italian researcher Giulio Regeni.

Violence and abuses are committed at the very moment they are denied: truth is replaced by doublespeak as the regime produces its own “real reality”. The government’s anxiety of control is projected onto the Egyptian population as a particular type of “neurotic citizenship” (Isin 2004), as if this anxiety were the responsibility of the dissidents. Those demanding justice still meet the same response that the police gave in 2013 to Vicki Langohr and activist and lawyer Azza Suleiman: “Let the revolution help you!” (Langohr 2013). What are Egyptians supposed to feel and do? What are these continuous double binds doing to the feminists living in Egypt, and in Cairo in particular?

In the previous chapters I have discussed how political affects are a technology of government that weave together young women’s practices and feminist consciousness in remaking the Egyptian nation-state in pre- and post-revolutionary Cairo. I have argued that affects such as love, terror, pain and joy – as much as discourses – form political and nationalist subjectivities. The management of affects in hyper-controlled and constantly struggling Cairo, a site of political contestation, took particular configurations. It relied on the intimacies and embodiments of everyday gender politics, with their reproductive aspirations, generational anxieties and moral circuits.

The interlocking of social reproduction and gender-based political violence suggests that affects work in complex and contradictory ways which are productive as much as destructive. Biopolitics and necropolitics – the governing power to decide who can live or die and how they can do so – operated in such a way that the renewal of the state was not only part of a discourse or bureaucratic process. The neoliberal and neocolonial Egyptian state has been revived through the reappropriation of nationalism and militarism as a single history. Contrary to the notion that identity politics is an alternative to participatory politics, the rise of militarization put centre stage the value of gender roles and relations as affectively productive. Neoliberal transformations benefitted from militarization and the rise of the security

¹⁹⁴ “Sosteniamo Egitto nella lotta al terrorismo.” *Rai News*. 13th March 2015. <http://www.rainews.it/dl/rainews/articoli/Forum-economico-Sharm-El-Sheik-renzi-sosteniamo-egitto-in-lotta-a-terrorismo-f7174119-49fb-48dc-b77d-02de6dd680a2.html>. Last access: 15th March 2016.

apparatus. Whereas the Islamist government proposed religious identity as a nationalist identity, militarist commodities were part of a circuit that recreated a culturalized version of the Egyptian nationalist family at the core of a military project. Militarism positioned itself within the nationalist history of the Republic of Egypt, and appropriated sentiments and embodiments associated with “victimized” or “loving” femininities and “protective” and “aggressive” masculinities.

Political affects circulated through and between objects, bodies and urban spaces to concretely materialize gendered relations of belonging and visions of Egypt’s historical political past and future. Daily commodities branded “El Sisi” held the romance of the future military president and transmitted his “mystic” masculine strength. They replayed the history of the Egyptian state as a husband-leader to his nation-wife in the intimacy of daily life. Love for the president refashioned the patriarchal household as a comfortable place of safety and strength. The reappropriation of “comforting” hierarchical gender roles that had been transgressed during the revolution went hand in hand with the capitalization on new “safe properties” in the city of Cairo. “Pink taxis”, free self-defence courses and private developments catered to Egyptian women from different strata in response to gendered anxieties over safety, and more widely to the future social reproduction of the middle and upper classes. Men’s neighbourhood patrols, and women’s embodiments of defence or mimesis, ambivalently altered the perception of the city. From a political space to a violent, gendered disorder, Cairo became a space in need of material control, intersecting with class and gender dimensions. The analysis of affects thus underlines the centrality of domestic relations and reproductive aspirations as the locus where the nation-state economy of affects can materialize and exercise control.

The “liberation” from the threat of Islamism, which was constructed as extraneous to Egypt, was built as an invitation to love the president and the state by way of loving the nation. The military wives, the female “victims” of “extraneous” masculinities, the self-defence classes, all fitted into the neoliberal discourse of safety. In Cairo, this developed into a circuit of securitization of urban spaces which responded to middle-class aspirations as well as to the retreat of the state from its political obligations over informal communities, infrastructures and social well-being. A nationalist family emerged, in which gender expectations and desires mingled with class in the urban spaces of Cairo. Security was translated into an investment. On the side of the family, it became an issue of protection from social instability; of exchanging the landscape of chaotic Cairo with the quality of life of a private, controlled community; of privatizing upward mobility. Informal communities were represented as disseminators of

deviant masculinities. Amid forms of dispossession, gender hierarchies remained a form of capital invested in articulating and making desirable what change is.

Putting gender issues at the forefront of their fight, the feminist activists and initiatives I met moved in a context of political violence and social stigma against women's activism, at a time when gendered articulations of nationalism and militarism were fusing. Through an exploration of political affects, I have analysed how a range of feminist practices, memories, embodiments and symbols became politically, socially and culturally transformative. The feminist consciousness that emerged with the revolution was linked both to the history of women nationalists in Egypt, and to the previous articulations of women's and feminist organizations in the country. The young feminists I met during my fieldwork took pride in their participation in the upheavals since 2011. Their belonging, however, had distinctively novel traits: although they adopted a generational language, they did not feel like "daughters" of the Egyptian feminist movement. They were wary of how generational metaphors might mask the dismissal of initiatives led by young activists, and of the well-known traps of state feminism and governmental oppression – including from international organizations and actors. Young feminists' insistence on mnemonic practices, independent knowledge production, and interventions against state and non-state gender-based violence highlighted the hidden mechanisms through which gender was appropriated by the nation-state to restore a masculinist status quo (Kandiyoti 2013).

Between 2012 and 2014, systematic sexual violence was used against female protesters in particular: the moral criminalization of women and feminist activists left a mark on the political consciousness of many feminists I met, and transformed them bodily and emotionally in their relationship with Cairo. Authenticity and morality justified the sexual aggressions and dismissal of feminist initiatives in the square, while the emergence of masculine "protectors" or "abusers" subordinated the agency of female bodies to an external power. The desirability of control subsumed the desirability of change in the figure of President El Sisi, appreciated as a masculine saviour and a continuator of Nasser in making the history of Egypt. Many young feminists, however, were not snared in this affective net. The intersectionality of feminist experiences, and dilemmas about the legislative gains of criminalizing gender-based violence under a militarist regime, represented an affective sliding where the relationship with the nation-state was felt, imagined and embodied in other ways.

What affects may do, thus, raises the anthropological question of how to relate the quest for change to the dread of possibilities in post-revolutionary Cairo. Oppression and desire worked simultaneously: affects are not stable or unidirectional. Indeed, feminist initiatives failed to "feel" for the regime and maintained their attachment to the revolution. For many of them,

affective management highlighted the intersectionality of nationalist identities and multiple discriminations and oppressions, such as those against religious or racial minorities. Initiatives against sexual harassment and political violence had to face the ambiguity of gendered embodiments and violence in rescuing women, without reinforcing protective masculinities or the militarization of Egypt. The erasure of feminine contributions and gender transgressions crystallized into gender schools, online archives of women's initiatives, and bodily and creative acts of feminist self-care in the city: from biking to street art that mingled cultural icons with gender critiques. For my feminist subjects, the circulation of affects outside of nationalist love and fear opened up new scenarios of gendered possibilities, embodiments and habitations in Cairo. They were kept alive even when these scenarios looked unattainable.

The diffusion of women-led and feminist initiatives in the years preceding and following the revolution assumed a practical and symbolic importance for the militarist remodelling of the regime. Taming feminist activists and organizations was distinctive and crucial to the regime, and yet it kept failing. In Egypt, the subversive character of the gender roles promoted by revolutionary female activists and feminist initiatives propelled social and political transformation, strengthening their anti-authoritarian protests. Their opposition cannot be separated from that of other groups, which hold onto revolutionary ideals without placing gender issues at the forefront of their demands. However, their focus on gender issues offers a crucial angle on the variety of anti-militarist, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist revolutionary and post-revolutionary positions; and it also highlights the valuation of patriarchal gender relations, refashioned by the management of political affects to restore the dominance of the state and its "moral superiority" against all political, social and cultural "deviants".

Not all feminists and militant activists agreed with the feminist changes and strategies described in this thesis. Some feminist and women's initiatives that worked towards revolutionary change – with greater or lesser degrees of enthusiasm – were either state-led, such as the National Council for Women, or belonged under the umbrella of liberal feminisms,¹⁹⁵ such as the ECWR. By repeating regime rhetoric, they reinforced the need for military protection from "Arab masculine oppression" and from a dangerous Westernization of

¹⁹⁵ As Naber and Abdel Hameed (2016) describe, this is the case of Egyptian feminist initiatives and activists that stand on other grounds than the revolutionary feminists described in this thesis: they are "state, developmental, and equal rights-based feminisms... State feminists seek to monopolize feminism and protect the image of the state as a supporter of women's rights. Some developmental feminists prioritize the integration of women into neoliberal economic projects. They are less threatening to the state because their work is not politicized when it comes to challenging state violence. Equal rights feminism isolates women's oppressions from other oppressions while working to end sexism and sexualized violence, overlooking violence committed by the state" (Naber and Abdel Hameed 2016: 523).

dress, while supporting neoliberal and neocolonial plans in the country. The problematic of their position is extended by Naber and Abdel Hameed (2016) to Western liberal feminists. In Naber and Abdel Hameed's view, a non-reflexive feminist focus on equality and violence against women in the Middle East sustains racializing stereotypes and conceals the implications of geopolitical power relations (i.e. US funding for the occupation of Palestine) that crucially determine the heavy militarization of Egypt, the continuum of state and non-state violence, and the high level of police violence against young men.

In tackling patriarchy, the feminist practices I have focused on – in relation to sexual violence, memory, sexual harassment and the walls of Cairo – are accompanied by calls for action, declarations, slogans, research projects and statements. Their transformative and challenging character is not simply expressed in words, however. The public exposure of sexual violence and bodily wounds was not only an instrument to speak about feminine fragility, pain, strength and resilience. Wounds and bruises were also living articulations of the gendered multiformity of body politics in Egypt (cf. Aretxaga 1997). These feminists moved against mainstream liberal-feminist discourses and the symbols and discourses of heroic nationalism. They made an incision into the revolutionary movement by challenging and subverting the discourses of masculine wildness and protection from terrorism, and the gender-based violence, homophobia and misogyny entrenched in the structure of the nation-state.

The understanding of the subversive character of the politics of feminist affects in Cairo, before and after the 2011 revolution, is open to further research in a number of areas. The locality of Egyptian feminism should be situated within transnational feminist activism and the “travelling” of their creative initiatives. Further research would link Egyptian feminists to the feminist activism that took part in the protests that shook the Mediterranean and MENA region after 2011. The relationship between the privatization of security, militarism and gender-based violence also needs to be seen in relation to geopolitical relationships of interest, to delineate the global dimensions that these circuits of coercion, infrastructure and capital articulate locally. Conversely, comparative research about other squares, and the remaking of urban political spaces, could provide critical examples of the gender tensions and dynamics of gender-based violence among radical and militant protesters. Further work among working-class women, feminist initiatives outside Cairo, queer groups, and upper-class families living in gated developments could enrich our current understanding of how class relations, space and age intersect with the complex formation of secular feminisms, gender relations, and masculinities and femininities in Egypt. Such work may enable us to better grasp how intersectionality works affectively, and what range of generational and reproductive aspirations play a role in supporting nationalism and militarism.

As social and political conditions deteriorate under severe repression, however, it is difficult to imagine how future research and feminist relationships might be built at the moment, within a fragmented revolutionary movement (Abdelrahman 2015a). Certainly, the feminists I met did not need external interpretative tools to understand their context or bring change to the patriarchal structure of Egyptian society. They would need, from feminists, a strong stance against the conditions that enable militarism to grow globally (see Rabed and Abdel Hameed 2016). This study has tried not to repeat trite stereotypes about the Arab exceptionalism of gender-based violence and the sudden political presence of women in the Middle East. The writing-up of this thesis, which took place in Sardinia for the most part, was influenced by this view. While writing about Egyptian feminism – amid the development of a new industrial weapons complex near my home, the precarization of labour, the normalization of state colonialism, and growing xenophobia, racism, gender-based violence and class struggle masquerading as “generational differences” and “cultural incompatibility” – I daily questioned the difficult position of decolonial “feminist solidarity” in transnational trajectories of anti-authoritarianism, anti-imperialism and anti-militarism.

These trajectories do not end with this thesis. At the same time, I am aware, though, of the margins of unrepeatability which the historical experience of transitioning from the revolution to a militarist regime represented in contemporary Egypt. Every ethnography is undoubtedly unique: every field unfolds or closes differently to different ethnographers (Al-Ali 2000; Navaro-Yashin 2002). But beyond that, it seems that love and terror have turned into a spiralling political and social fantasy of violence which intends to strangle revolutionary dreams. As writer Ahdaf Soueif put it,¹⁹⁶ once-hopeful protests may soon return in the garb of boiling protests. Perhaps, as activist Alaa Abd El Fattah commented from prison,¹⁹⁷ this is because hope, like despair, has become a politically treacherous emotion in the quest for change. If hope perhaps no longer constitutes the texture of revolutionary acts, what is the affective force that the revived nation-state is now seeking? More than a ghostly, lingering presence, the nation-state exists – as imprisoned writer Ahmed Naji¹⁹⁸ has described in his controversial 2014 novel – as a body politic of zombies: a nightmare of the living dead, stuck in a perennial present with no future and no real life. Throughout the attacks and state crackdowns that have affected the feminist movements in Egypt, the young feminists I

¹⁹⁶ See note 231.

¹⁹⁷ Alaa Abd El Fattah. “Graffiti for two... Alaa and Douma.” *Mada Masr*. 25th January 2014. <http://www.madamasr.com/en/2014/01/25/feature/politics/graffiti-for-two-alaa-and-douma>. Last access: 15th March 2016.

¹⁹⁸ Ahmed Naji. “Farewell to the youth.” *Mada Masr*. 2nd January 2016. <http://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/01/02/opinion/u/farewell-to-the-youth>. Last access: 4th June 2016.

encountered keep proving every day that resilient and creative living happens in the gaps between the claws of the authoritarian regime. Their projects and relationships challenge authoritarian oppression and neoliberal constraints, locally and transnationally, reopening patriarchal spaces, bodies, emotional ties and temporalities. Their initiatives, like their lives, are fragile and experienced in differences; change remains deeply at their heart.

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APPENDIX

List of Interviewees

Aida. Feminist activist and academic in her thirties.

Aliaa. Feminist activist and human rights defender in her twenties. Involved in NGOs and informal initiatives.

Amal. Feminist activist in her twenties. Member of Mosireen.

Amina. Feminist activist in her twenties. Involved in a development organization.

Aziza. Feminist and political activist in her thirties.

Christina. Women's rights activist in her twenties. Founder of an online anti-harassment initiative.

Dunya. Feminist activist in her thirties. Involved in various groups and in the new collective.

Farah. Feminist artist in her thirties.

Farida. Feminist activist in her twenties. Member of various groups and involved in the new collective.

Fayza. Feminist activist in her twenties. Member of Women and Memory.

Galila. Women's rights activist in her twenties. Member of HarassMap.

Habiba. Feminist activist in her twenties. Member of OpAntiSH and other initiatives.

Hala. Women's rights activist in her twenties. Member of HarassMap.

Hoda. Feminist activist and creative in her twenties. Member of Nooneswa and involved in other groups.

Lamya. Feminist activist in her twenties. Member of Baheya Ya Masr and of an NGO.

Lana. Feminist activist in her twenties. Involved in a development initiative.

Malak. Feminist activist in her twenties. Involved in various groups and in the new collective.

Malika. Feminist activist and survivor in her twenties.

Manal. Feminist activist and entrepreneur in her thirties.

Maryam. Feminist activist in her thirties. Member of Nazra.

Nahla. Women's rights' activist and entrepreneur in her forties.

Nour. Feminist activist in her twenties. Involved in politics and informal initiatives.

Rabia. Feminist activist and artist in her twenties. Member of Nazra.

Rania. Women's rights activist in her thirties. Member of HarassMap.

Reem. Feminist activist and human rights lawyer. Member of Nazra.

Safa. Feminist activist in her twenties. Member of a human rights organization and of OpAntiSH.

Sahar. Gender activist and writer/dramatist in her twenties.

Salima. Feminist activist and ethnographer in her twenties. Member of various groups.

Shaimaa. Feminist artist in her twenties. Involved in various groups.

Sara. Feminist activist in her twenties. Involved in politics and several initiatives.

Taliba. Researcher and member of OpAntiSH.

Yousra. Independent feminist activist in her thirties. Former member of a feminist organization.

Zahra. Feminist activist in her twenties. Member of Imprint.

Zubaida. Feminist activist and researcher in her twenties. Involved in various women's rights groups.

Ahmed. Anti-sexual harassment activist in his twenties.

Nabil. Women's rights activist in his twenties. Member of anti-harassment initiatives.

Rami. Feminist activist in his twenties. Involved in various groups and in an NGO.

Taymour. Women's rights activist and artist in his twenties. Member of a political party.